

Contact us  
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Or  
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Houston Health Department Laboratory  
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[www.houstontx.gov/health/water.html](http://www.houstontx.gov/health/water.html)



## DRINKING WATER INFORMATION & TESTING

The City of Houston Water & Dairy Environmental Microbiology Lab accepts and tests samples of water intended for human consumption and use. Water is tested for the presence of Total Coliform bacteria and E. coli. The analysis takes 24 hours to complete.

Samples must be submitted in sterile treated bottles supplied by the City of Houston Health Department, Harris County Health Department, the Texas Department of State Health Services, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), or your local health authority.

- Water samples are accepted **Monday – Friday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm**
- The fee for drinking water testing is \$16.50 per bottle
- Payment must be made when the sample is delivered to the laboratory. We accept checks, money orders, credit cards (Visa, MC, Discover), and City of Houston accounts.
- Samples will not be processed without payment or a City of Houston account in good standing.
- **No cash will be accepted – no exceptions**

### Sample Collection

- Select a cold water faucet, preferably an outside faucet that does not leak (avoid hoses, fire hydrants, dirty areas, and areas behind bushes). Do not take samples from kitchen or bathroom sinks. Avoid sampling on extremely windy days or when it is raining.
- Remove any screen or attachment to the faucet
- Clean the faucet head with isopropyl alcohol or bleach solution and/or flame with a handheld torch.
- Run the water 2 or 3 minutes to clear the line.
- Adjust the flow to a slow, steady stream.
- Remove the shrink band from the bottle (do not use the bottle if the shrink band is missing)
- Remove the lid of the bottle. **Do not touch the inside of the lid or the bottle. Do not rinse out the bottle.**
- Fill the bottle ABOVE the 100ml line to at least the shoulder of the bottle, leaving adequate space for mixing. **Do not overfill the bottle.**
- Underfilled and overfilled bottles will not be analyzed
- Replace the lid tightly
- Place the sample in a cooler with ice or ice packs and transport to the lab within 28 hours of collection.
- **Do not freeze the sample.** Frozen samples will not be analyzed.

### **Fill out the required Sample Form**

- Fill out all information for each sample on the LEFT side of the bold center line on the form using BLACK ink.
- PUBLIC systems must include PWS ID number on all samples.
- PUBLIC systems must include Chlorine residual on all Routine and Repeat samples.
- PUBLIC systems may put up to 6 sample locations **from the same system number** on one form.
- The test result will be mailed to the name and address you write on the form. **Please write legibly** to ensure proper recording of all information.
- If you have questions about the form, please call 832.393.3939 for help completing it.

### **Sample Transport**

- **Deliver the sample to the laboratory within 28 hours of collection**
- **Water samples should be held and transported to the lab on ice or ice packs.**
- Do not allow the sample form to get wet during transport of the sample.
- If you cannot deliver the sample on the day of collection, store it in the refrigerator overnight and transport it on ice **within 28 hours of collection.**

### **Sample Results**

- We will attempt to contact you by phone using the number you wrote on the form IF
  - Your sample was unsatisfactory for any reason and we were not able to analyze it.
  - Coliform organisms were present in your sample.
- Verbal results are available 24 hours after you drop off your sample
- Reports are mailed to the address you write on the form.
- You should receive your report within 5 to 7 business days.
- If your report does not arrive within 2 weeks, please contact the laboratory at 832.393.3939.
- To locate a report, we must have
  - The date the sample was submitted AND
  - The name of the return addressee exactly the way it was written on the form.

### **What do your results mean?**

- If Total Coliform and E. coli organisms are **ABSENT**
  - The water is bacteriologically safe to use at the time of sampling.
- If Total Coliform organisms are **PRESENT**
  - The water contains bacteria commonly found in run-off or surface water, which could include disease producing organisms.

- If E. coli organisms are **PRESENT**
  - The water contains bacteria that is commonly found in sewage (animal or human) which could include disease producing organisms.
- If Total Coliform or E. coli organisms are **PRESENT** **The water is NOT SAFE to use for drinking, bathing, brushing teeth, washing hands, or washing any food you will eat raw.**
- Disinfect the well according to TCEQ instructions (available on our website) and submit another sample before using the water.