

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 28, 2017

Joint agency media release from Gooding and Lincoln counties as well as the South Central Public Health District and Idaho Department of Environmental Quality. This updated media release includes frequently asked questions and answers.

*There will be a Gooding and Lincoln County town hall meeting on Friday, March 3, 2017 at 7:00 pm. This meeting will take place at the Lincoln County Community Center located at 201 South Beverly in Shoshone. Lincoln County and Gooding County will have representatives available to answer questions along with representatives from the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality. There may be other agencies in attendance to answer questions as well.*

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): For Residents of Lincoln and Gooding Counties

Compiled by South Central Public Health District (Updated 02.28.2017)

This document applies to residents of Lincoln and Gooding counties, living in the areas of 320 North to 750 North and west of Hwy 75, to Lincoln / Gooding County line and in Gooding County, from 2400 East to 2200 East on 1300 South then North 3 miles back east to county line road (see map included in this update)

### Is my water safe to drink or use?

Answered by South Central Public Health District (SCPHD)

If the well water looks, smells, or tastes different than normal, it should not be used for anything other than flushing toilets until:

- The water returns to a normal look and smell,
- the well has been disinfected,
- and a laboratory test shows the water clear of bacteria.

If the well water has not had any change to look, taste, or smell, but you are concerned, you may test the water for coliform bacteria.

- If the test results show that there are not coliform bacteria, then you can use the water as normal, but we recommend that you be on the lookout for any changes in water quality.
- If the test results show that there are coliform bacteria, we advise that you check the water for nitrate. Nitrate test strips are available at the Gooding and Lincoln County Courthouses. Call ahead to make sure they have the strips before going there to pick up one.
  - If the nitrate test strip shows less than 10 mg/L (or ppm) nitrate in the water, then:
    - You can boil the water for at least 1 minute for drinking, cooking, dishwashing, and brushing teeth
    - Unboiled water can be used for other uses
    - We recommend that you disinfect your well and water system by using the steps on our website [www.phd5.idaho.gov](http://www.phd5.idaho.gov)
    - It may take multiple disinfection attempts before the system is clean.
  - If the nitrate test strip shows 10 mg/L (ppm) nitrate or more, then:
    - Do not boil the water
    - Do not use well water for drinking, cooking, dishwashing, or brushing teeth
    - Water can be used for other uses.
    - We recommend that you disinfect your well and water system by using the steps on our website [www.phd5.idaho.gov](http://www.phd5.idaho.gov).
    - It may take multiple disinfection attempts before the system is clean.

## What should I do if I have nitrate in my water?

Answered by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

Because water quality in the area is unknown and may contain both *E. coli* and nitrate, seek an alternative source of water. Unless you know the quality of your drinking water for both nitrate and bacteria through testing:

**Do not give the water to infants.** Infants below the age of six months who drink water containing nitrate in excess of 10 mg/L could become seriously ill and, if untreated, may die. Symptoms include shortness of breath and blue baby syndrome. Blue baby syndrome is indicated by blueness of the skin. Symptoms in infants can develop rapidly with health deteriorating over a period of days. If symptoms occur, seek medical attention immediately.

Water, juice, and formula for children under six months of age should not be prepared with tap water. Bottled water or other water low in nitrates should be used for infants until further notice.

**Do not boil water.** Boiling, freezing, filtering, or letting water stand does not reduce the nitrate level. Excessive boiling can make the nitrates more concentrated, because nitrates remain behind when the water evaporates.

## What do I do if my test results are positive for total coliform?

Answered by South Central Public Health District (SCPHD)

Total coliform is one group of mostly harmless bacteria that live in soil and water, though some members live in the intestines of animals. The presence of total coliforms in drinking water can indicate that more dangerous germs have contaminated the water.

The most common source of bacteria is the soil surrounding the well. Fecal bacteria (like *E. coli*) in water are usually the result of contamination by a nearby source, which could be a sewer, septic system, feedlot, animal yard, or just water running across the ground.

If the test results show that there are coliform bacteria in your well water, we advise that you check the water for nitrate. Nitrate test strips are available at the Gooding and Lincoln County Courthouses. Call ahead to make sure they have the strips before going there to pick up one.

- **If the nitrate test strip shows less than 10 mg/L (or ppm) nitrate in the water, then:**
  - You can boil the water for at least 1 minute for drinking, cooking, dishwashing, and brushing teeth
  - Unboiled water can be used for other uses
  - We recommend that you disinfect your well and water system by using the steps on our website [www.phd5.idaho.gov](http://www.phd5.idaho.gov).
    - i. It may take multiple disinfection attempts before the system is clean.
- **If the nitrate test strip shows 10 mg/L (ppm) nitrate or more, then:**
  - Do not boil the water
  - Do not use well water for drinking, cooking, dishwashing or brushing teeth
  - Water can be used for other uses.
  - We recommend that you disinfect your well and water system by using the steps on our website.
  - It may take multiple disinfection attempts before the system is clean.

## What do I do if my test results are positive for *E. coli*?

Answered by South Central Public Health District (SCPHD)

- If the test results show that there are *E. coli* bacteria in your well water, you need to be aware that *E. coli* is a type of coliform bacteria that lives mostly in the intestines of animals. *E. coli* can make you sick, and are a

particular concern for people with weakened immune systems (young, elderly, those on certain medications). We advise that you check the water for nitrate. Nitrate test strips are available at the Gooding and Lincoln County Courthouses. Call ahead to make sure they have the strips before going there to pick up one.

- If the nitrate test strip shows less than 10 mg/L (or ppm) nitrate in the water, then:
  - You can boil the water for at least 1 minute for drinking, cooking, dishwashing, and brushing teeth
  - Unboiled water can be used for other uses
  - We recommend that you disinfect your well and water system by using the steps on our website.
  - It may take multiple disinfection attempts before the system is clean.
- If the nitrate test strip shows 10 mg/L (ppm) nitrate or more, then:
  - Do not boil the water
  - Do not use well water for drinking, cooking, dishwashing or brushing teeth
  - Water can be used for other uses.
  - We recommend that you disinfect your well and water system by using the steps on our website.
  - It may take multiple disinfection attempts before the system is clean.

### Will boiling my water make it safe for my family to drink?

*Answered by South Central Public Health District (SCPHD)*

If your water still looks, smells, and tastes normal, and doesn't have high nitrates or other chemicals of concern, then yes, boiling the water for 1 minute will make it safe to drink. If the water looks, smells, or tastes different than it normally does, boiling the water will not help.

### Can I bathe or shower if my water is clear?

*Answered by South Central Public Health District (SCPHD)*

Yes. Just avoid drinking any of the water.

### If my well tested positive when should I retest my water?

*Answered by South Central Public Health District (SCPHD)*

We recommend that you follow the procedure on our website, which includes a water system disinfection step. You may need to disinfect the water system more than once.

### How long will this go on?

*Answered by South Central Public Health District (SCPHD)*

We do not know at this time how long it will take for any particular well to recover. It will depend upon the weather, how the particular well was constructed, how it has been maintained, and where it is.

### Can I use/ drink my water if it's positive for total coliform or positive E. coli?

*Answered by South Central Public Health District (SCPHD)*

You can use the water for anything that does not involve consuming the water (i.e. it is ok for washing clothes or bathing, but should not be used for drinking, cooking, washing dishes, or brushing teeth).

### Where/how do I report the test results?

*Answered by South Central Public Health District (SCPHD)*

Call South Central Public Health District's hot line: 208-737-1138 or 1-866-710-9775 or email the results to [scphd@phd5.idaho.gov](mailto:scphd@phd5.idaho.gov). Be sure to give your name, contact number or email, and the test results.

For those in Lincoln County you take a copy of your test results to the Lincoln County Planning and Zoning office if you choose.

[Why is this happening/ how did this happen?](#)

Contact DEQ for ground water related information 208-736-2190.

**SIRCOMM recommends that all citizens within Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, and Twin Falls Counties sign up for the Citizens Alert Network (CAN) system so that in the event of an incident affecting a specific area or county, you will be able to be notified in a timely manner. You can sign up by going to [www.sircomm.com](http://www.sircomm.com) and scroll down the page to the CAN system banner. Residents in the City of Twin Falls can also sign up for alerts within city limits as well.**

