

Public Notification Templates for Noncommunity Public Water Systems



Includes Notices for:

- Total Coliform**
- E. Coli**
- Nitrate**



Minnesota Department of Health
Drinking Water Protection Section
Noncommunity Public Water Supply Unit
625 Robert Street North
P.O. Box 64975
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975
651/201-4700

www.health.state.mn.us/water

Public Notification Templates for Noncommunity Public Water Systems: Total Coliform, E. Coli, and Nitrate

This packet includes template “public notifications” to be used when total coliform, E. coli, or nitrate contamination is confirmed in a noncommunity public water system. These templates have been developed by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), Noncommunity Public Water Supply Unit for use by noncommunity public water systems in Minnesota. If you have any questions about how these templates should be used, please contact the Noncommunity Public Water Supply Unit at 651/201-4700. This packet is also available electronically at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/water/ncom/forms/pnpacket.pdf>

What Is “Public Notification”?

When contamination is confirmed at a noncommunity public water system, the water system is *required* to inform its customers/employees of the problem. It is important to keep in mind that providing notice is as much of a legal requirement as sampling – and maybe even more important in terms of protecting public health.

How is Public Notification Done?

For noncommunity public water systems, notification is typically provided by posting notices at all fixtures that supply drinking water (or water for other sanitary uses) and in common areas used by customers/employees (such as entry areas or breakrooms).

When Does the Notice Need to be Posted?

Public notification is required when contamination is *confirmed* as follows:

- **Total coliform and E. coli:** Postings need to go up once repeat samples confirm the presence of total coliform or E. coli.
- **Nitrate:** Notice is required once the confirmation sample results are back and the average of original and confirmation sample is greater than 10 mg/l.

Why Are There Separate Notices for Total Coliform and E. coli?

The presence of total coliform indicates that a breach or malfunction has occurred in the water system and that disease-causing organisms may be present. While this is cause for concern and restriction of drinking the water, it is not as serious a situation as the presence of E. coli. The presence of E. coli indicates that human or animal fecal contamination has occurred and there is real likelihood that other disease-causing organisms are present in the water supply. Because of the differing level of hazard in these situations, different notices – which incorporate specific instructions and water use restrictions – have been developed. ***Be sure to use the correct notice for the type of contamination that has been identified!!***

What Else Needs to Happen When Contamination is Confirmed?

There are several actions that need to be taken when contamination is confirmed:

- **Alternate Source of Water:** The public water system needs to provide an alternate, safe source of water. In some cases, it may be appropriate simply to direct water users to another location (such as a campsite served by a different well).
- **Water Use Restrictions:** Beyond preventing drinking of the water, there may be other water use restrictions that need to be in place, depending on the contaminant detected and how water is used in the facility. The public notice templates provide instructions for additional restrictions. A fact sheet describing specific procedures for licensed establishments has been developed by MDH-Environmental Health Services and is available at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/food/fs/index.htm>.
- **Corrective Action:** Any deficiencies in the water system that may be contributing to the contamination should be corrected. The water supply should be disinfected in cases of total coliform and E. coli contamination (disinfection instructions are available at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/water/ncom/fs/welldisinfection.pdf>). In some cases, a new well or permanent treatment may be needed to correct the contamination. Specific steps taken will depend on the characteristics of the system and the contaminant detected.

How Long Must the Posting Stay in Place?

The posting notice(s) must stay in place until water test results show that the contamination is no longer present (i.e. four absent coliform samples or nitrate results consistently below 10 mg/l). The water system should keep their notice(s) in place until they are informed of the results by state or local health department staff and instructed to remove the postings.

What if a System Refuses to Post a Public Notice?

The most important reason why a water system should provide public notice is to prevent illness. It is also important to keep in mind that providing public notice is a legal requirement, and you should inform the water system owner/operator of this, particularly if they are reluctant to provide notice. It may also be useful to discuss the potential for enforcement action (and potential liability) if the owner fails to meet legal requirements. However, if you do find yourself in a situation where the owner/operator persists in refusing to post a notice, you have the option of simply referring the situation for compliance/enforcement action – contact the Noncommunity Public Water Supply Unit at 651/201-4700 for more information.

DRINKING WATER WARNING: Tests Show Presence of Coliform Bacteria

DO NOT DRINK THIS WATER



**DO NOT USE
THIS WATER FOR:
Drinking
Food Preparation
Making Ice
Brushing Teeth**

**For your safety, until the contamination problem has been corrected,
safe drinking water is being provided as follows:**

Water sampling results have detected total coliform bacteria in this water supply.

POTENTIAL HEALTH EFFECTS

Coliforms are bacteria that are naturally present in the environment and are used as an indicator that other potentially harmful bacteria may be present.

Some people, including immuno-compromised people, some elderly, and infants may be at increased risk if potentially harmful bacteria are present in the water supply.

In order to protect public health, the Minnesota Department of Health does not allow use of the water for drinking if coliform bacteria are present.

STEPS WE ARE TAKING

Until the contamination problem has been corrected, we are providing safe drinking water at the location given above. The following steps are also being taken to correct the problem:

If you have any questions, please contact us at:



Minnesota Department of Health
Drinking Water Protection Section
625 Robert Street North
St. Paul, MN 55155-2538
651/201-4700

Instructions for Public Notification-Total Coliform Bacteria Warning Notice

When do I use this notice?

This public notice is to be used when the presence of total coliform bacteria has been detected in the water supply. This notice must not be used when E. coli has been detected.

How do I use this notice?

The notice should be completed by providing the following information: location where safe drinking water is being provided, steps being taken to correct the problem, and the name/phone number of a contact person at the public water system. Copies of the notice must then be posted at all fixtures that provide drinking water (such as sinks, drinking fountains, and water coolers).

Food and beverage establishments should provide notice at their entry area(s), and should inform customers that bottled or boiled water is being used for all drinking/cooking purposes. Lodging establishments should provide notice at check-in and should inform customers that bottled water for drinking is being provided in their rooms.

How long must I post the notice?

Notice(s) must remain in place until sampling confirms that the total coliform bacteria is no longer present in the water system. You will be informed by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) or your local health agency when the notices may be removed.

Am I required to post this notice?

Yes. Public notification is required for violations of drinking water standards under the Safe Drinking Water Act and Minnesota Rules, Chapter 4720. Please note that this notice contains required health effects language. Changes in the content of this notice must not be made without the consent of MDH or your local health agency.

DRINKING WATER WARNING: Tests Show Presence of E. Coli Bacteria

DO NOT DRINK THIS WATER



DO NOT USE THIS WATER FOR:

- Drinking**
- Food Preparation**
- Making Ice**
- Brushing Teeth**
- Manual Dishwashing**

TAKE SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS (AS GIVEN BELOW) FOR THESE USES:

- Hand Washing**
- Bathing**
- Showering**

For your safety, until the contamination problem has been corrected, safe drinking water is being provided as follows:

Water sampling results have detected E. coli bacteria in this water supply.

POTENTIAL HEALTH EFFECTS

E. coli are bacteria whose presence indicates that the water may be contaminated with human or animal wastes. Microbes in these wastes can cause diarrhea, cramps, nausea, headaches, or other symptoms. They may pose a special health risk for infants, young children, and people with severely compromised immune systems.

In order to protect public health, the Minnesota Department of Health does not allow use of the water for drinking, or the other uses listed above, as long as E. coli bacteria are present.

PRECAUTIONS FOR HAND WASHING

If untreated water is used for hand washing, a commercially produced hand sanitizer wipe, lotion, or cream should be used following hand washing.

PRECAUTIONS FOR BATHING AND SHOWERING

Infants and young children should not bathe using contaminated water, since they may ingest water during bathing.

STEPS WE ARE TAKING

Until the contamination problem has been corrected, we are providing safe drinking water at the location given above. The following steps are also being taken to correct the problem:

If you have any questions, please contact us at:



Minnesota Department of Health
Drinking Water Protection Section
625 Robert Street North
PO Box 64975
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975
651/201-4700

Instructions for Public Notification - E. Coli Bacteria Warning Notice

When do I use this notice?

This public notice is to be used when the presence of E. coli bacteria has been detected in the water supply.

How do I use this notice?

The notice should be completed by providing the following information: location where safe drinking water is being provided, steps being taken to correct the problem, and the name/phone number of a contact person at the public water system. Copies of the notice must then be posted at all fixtures that provide water for drinking or other sanitary purposes (such as sinks, drinking fountains, and water coolers).

Food and beverage establishments should provide notice at their entry area(s), and should inform customers that bottled or boiled water is being used for all drinking/sanitary purposes. Lodging establishments should provide notice at check-in and should inform customers that bottled water for drinking is being provided in their rooms.

How long must I post the notice?

Notice(s) must remain in place until sampling confirms that E. coli bacteria are no longer present in the water system. You will be informed by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) or your local health agency when the notices may be removed.

Am I required to post this notice?

Yes. Public notification is required for violations of drinking water standards under the Safe Drinking Water Act and Minnesota Rules, Chapter 4720. Please note that this notice contains required health effects language. Changes in the content of this notice must not be made without the consent of MDH or your local health agency.

DRINKING WATER WARNING: Tests Show Elevated Levels of Nitrate

DO NOT DRINK THIS WATER



**DO NOT USE
THIS WATER FOR:
Drinking
Preparing Baby Formula
Preparing Other Beverages**

**For your safety, until the contamination problem has been corrected,
safe drinking water is being provided as follows:**

Water sampling results have detected levels of nitrate in this water supply which are greater than the US EPA maximum contaminant level of 10 milligrams per liter (mg/l). Nitrate in drinking water is a serious health concern for infants less than six months old.

POSSIBLE HEALTH EFFECTS

Infants below the age of six months who drink water containing nitrate in excess of the maximum contaminant level could become seriously ill and, if untreated, may die. Symptoms include shortness of breath and blue baby syndrome.

Symptoms in infants can develop rapidly, with health deteriorating over a period of days. Seek medical attention immediately if symptoms occur in a child less than six months old.

If you are pregnant or have other specific health concerns, you may wish to contact your doctor regarding the effects of nitrate in drinking water.

Do not boil the water. Boiling can make nitrates more concentrated, because nitrates remain behind when water evaporates.

STEPS WE ARE TAKING

Until the contamination problem has been corrected, we are providing safe drinking water at the location listed above. The following steps are also being taken to correct the problem:

If you have any questions, please contact us at:



Minnesota Department of Health
Drinking Water Protection Section
625 Robert Street North
St. Paul, MN 55155
651/201-4700

Instructions for Public Notification-Nitrate Warning Notice

When do I use this notice?

This public notification posting is to be used when nitrate has been detected in your water supply at an amount greater than the maximum contaminant level (MCL) of 10 milligrams per liter (mg/l).

How do I use this notice?

The notice should be completed by providing the following information: location where safe drinking water is being provided, steps being taken to correct the problem, and the name/phone number of a contact person at the public water system. Copies of the notice must then be posted at all fixtures that provide drinking water (such as sinks, drinking fountains, and water coolers).

Food and beverage establishments should provide notice at their entry area(s), and should inform customers that bottled water is being used for all drinking/cooking purposes. Lodging establishments should provide notice at check-in and should inform customers that bottled water for drinking is being provided in their rooms.

How long must I post the notice?

Notice(s) must remain in place until nitrate levels remain below 10 mg/l. You will be informed by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) or your local health agency when the notices may be removed.

Am I required to post this notice?

Yes. Public notification is required for violations of drinking water standards under the Safe Drinking Water Act and Minnesota Rules, Chapter 4720. Please note that this notice contains required health effects language. Changes in the content of this notice must not be made without the consent of MDH or your local health agency.