

Escherichia coli (E. coli) detections in drinking water

What are *E. coli* bacteria?

E. coli are bacteria that are used to monitor faecal contamination in the water. They are normally found in the faeces of humans or other warm-blooded animals. Most types of *E. coli* are harmless, and their presence in the water suggests only that faecal contamination may have occurred and that disease causing organisms may be present.

Why do drinking water suppliers test for *E. coli*?

It is impossible to test for every type of disease causing organism in every water sample. Instead, drinking water suppliers test for indicator organisms, like *E. coli*, to check for possible contamination.

What to do when drinking water is contaminated?

People should bring drinking water to the boil and then allow water to cool before using it or storing it in a clean, closed container for later use. Water does not need to be held at boiling point for any specified amount of time.

People should use cooled boiled water or bottled water for:

- drinking
- brushing teeth
- washing and preparing food or beverages
- preparing baby formula
- making ice
- bathing infants.

Unboiled drinking water can be used for:

- showering and bathing other than infants (but avoid water in the mouth)
- washing dishes by hand or in a dishwasher, provided dishes are air-dried
- washing clothes
- flushing toilets.

Kettles with automatic cut-off switches are suitable for producing boiled water. Variable temperature kettles should be set to boil.

What to do if you are concerned about your health?

People suffering illness or suspected illness should go to their doctor and state that their drinking water has been contaminated. Remember that most types of *E. coli* are harmless and its presence in drinking water only indicates the possible presence of other disease-causing organisms. It is possible that they have contracted an illness other than one associated with *E. coli*.

For more information about the safety of your drinking water contact your drinking water supplier.

For specific health related enquiries call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84).