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For Immediate Release

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## **Well Water Nitrate Testing**

During the month of September, Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) is offering free nitrate/nitrite tests to well owners to learn about their drinking water quality. High levels of nitrates and nitrites in drinking water have been linked to serious health issues, including respiratory problems, particularly in infants and young children. There have been wells in southwest Nebraska that have tested high for nitrates during recent studies.

Nitrates are among the most significant groundwater contaminants in Nebraska. While nitrate is a naturally occurring compound in soil, human activities greatly increase its presence. Fertilizers, pesticides, and animal waste can soak into the ground, elevating nitrate levels in groundwater.

Nitrates can also convert into nitrite, a more harmful form of nitrogen that poses health risks at even lower concentrations. These contaminants are especially dangerous because they do not alter the taste, smell, or appearance of water, making them undetectable without proper testing.

A 2023–2024 study conducted by the State of Nebraska highlights that some wells across all regions of Nebraska test high for nitrates (see chart). The exact concentrations can vary over time with surface contamination and weather events such as storms or floods. Around 1 in 7 wells across the state test high for nitrates, highlighting the need for regular annual water testing to ensure safety.

“The only way to know if there is nitrate contamination in your well water is to test for it,” states Chloe Martin, Program Manager at SWNPHD. “We have been lucky to partner with the University of Nebraska to offer this free testing twice a year, in May and September.”

Throughout September well owners can bring a water sample to SWNPHD offices for free nitrate/nitrite paper strip tests as a first step to getting to know the quality of their drinking water.

### **To participate follow these steps:**

1. Collect your water sample from the faucet in your home that you drink from the most.
2. Let the water run for at least 5 minutes to flush the system.
3. Fill a clean, sealed container with enough water to take a drink.
4. Bring your sample to one of the following health department locations during regular business hours:
  - **McCook Office:** 404 West 10th Street, McCook, NE

- **Ogallala Office:** 418 North Spruce Street, Suite A, Ogallala, NE  
OR
- **Special Event September 23rd from 12pm – 4pm:** Dundy County Hospital Foundation Building, 516 Chief Street, Benkelman NE 69021

For more information on testing for nitrates or nitrites call SWNPHD at 308-345-4223. Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. You can follow SWNPHD on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram or view the website at [www.swhealth.ne.gov](http://www.swhealth.ne.gov) which contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health.

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## 3,478 PRIVATE DOMESTIC WELL NITRATE SAMPLES FROM THE 2023-2024 FREE NITRATE SAMPLING EFFORT

The average nitrate concentration for the samples collected as part of the free sampling effort was 4.83 mg/L.  
Around 15% of the samples were above the SDWA standard of 10 mg/L.

