How to Keep Your Baby Safe from Nitrates in Drinking Water

Groundwater Management Area (GWMA):
The purpose of the GWMA is to reduce nitrate contamination concentrations in groundwater below state drinking water standards

Nitrates are chemicals that occur naturally in drinking water and also result from human activities. Some private wells in the Yakima Valley are contaminated with nitrates. Nitrates can cause babies less than one year old to become sick. A symptom of nitrate exposure is your baby’s skin turning brown or blue. You might see this inside the nose or mouth, the lips, or the fingernail and toenail beds. Contact a doctor immediately if you see these changes in a baby.

Tips to Reduce Exposure

- Test your well water for nitrates and bacteria to ensure it is safe to drink for your baby. Information on testing well water is offered below.
- Do not use nitrate-contaminated well water to make baby formula.
- Do not let baby drink nitrate-contaminated water.
- If you have city water it should be safe to use for baby, or use well water that has been tested and is safe, or bottled water for baby.
- Nitrates can be a problem in some vegetables. Try to choose commercially prepared vegetable baby foods until the baby is 7 months old. Doctors recommend no solid foods before 4-6 months old.
- If you are pregnant, or plan to get pregnant, do not drink nitrate-contaminated well water
- Breast milk is safe for baby even if the mother drinks water contaminated with nitrates.

Children over one year old have the ability to break down nitrates so they’re not at risk. To keep babies safe, women who are pregnant or thinking of getting pregnant should not drink water with elevated nitrates.

Test your drinking water. All private wells should be tested before use and once per year for nitrates and bacteria. Nitrate concentrations change randomly throughout the year in the Yakima Valley. If nitrates are present in well water, other contaminants may also be present such as pesticides or bacteria.

Certified laboratories in the Yakima area that will test well drinking water for nitrates and bacteria:

- Cascade Analytical, Inc., 1008 W. Ahtanum, Yakima, WA 98903, (509) 452-7707
- Valley Environmental Laboratory, 201 E. “D” St., Yakima, WA 98901, (509) 575-3999
- Ag Health Laboratories, 445 Barnard Blvd, Sunnyside, WA 98944, (509) 836-2020

The total cost for nitrates and bacteria tests is between $52 and $70. Follow the directions provided by the laboratory – this is important to get good test results.

If a nitrate water test result is 10 mg/L or less the drinking water is safe. This means the water is safe for infants to drink and the water can be used to make formula for infants. The water is also safe for women who are pregnant or thinking about getting pregnant.

For more information about nitrates contact: Yakima Health District Help Line at (509)249-6508.

For clinician diagnosis and treatment guidance or other health effects: University of Washington (UW) PEHSU (Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Unit) at 1-800-543-2436.


Benton County: Benton Franklin Health District (509) 460-4200

Yakama Nation: Indian Health Services - Environmental Health (509) 865-1776