

# Test for well water offered at health fair

People have an opportunity to get a free nitrate test of your drinking water during the Bear Lake Memorial Hospital Senior's Health Fair on April 1 between the hours of 8 a.m. and noon.

Nitrate contamination in ground water is an increasing concern in Idaho. Nitrate is a chemical form of nitrogen found naturally in small amounts in soil and ground water. However, human activities such as the use of septic systems; leaching from feed lots, corrals, or fields having a large number

of animals in a small area; and, over application of nitrogen-based fertilizers can increase nitrate in ground water to dangerous levels. In areas having shallow depths to ground water, sandy soils, or shallow wells, nitrate contamination can easily occur.

Well water that has high levels of nitrate is a risk to human health, especially infants and animals. Many people assume that water coming from their kitchen faucet is clean and safe to drink. This is generally true for municipal or other public water

systems that must comply with state and federal drinking water standards. However, water from private wells does not have to meet these drinking water standards. It is solely the well owner's responsibility to ensure that drinking water consumed by family members is safe.

Drinking water that contains high levels of nitrate has caused serious illness and, in rare cases, death. It is especially dangerous for infants under the age of 6 months, unborn children, and adults with

low stomach acidity. Because this condition affects the ability of red blood cells to carry oxygen to the brain and other organs, it can result in a condition called methemoglobinemia or "blue baby syndrome."

Long-term ingestion of high levels of nitrate has been linked to gastric problems, certain birth defects, spontaneous abortion (in humans and livestock), and certain types of cancers.

Taking a water sample for testing is easy. Collect the sample on Health Fair day in a

clean jar or "zipper-type" baggie. Use a water source that is not connected to any treatment device (water softener, carbon filter, or other filtration system). An outside faucet or hydrant works best.

Allow the water to run 10 to 15 minutes to make sure the sample comes directly from the aquifer. Fill the container with about one cup of

water. Keep the sample cool. Participants will receive their results within five minutes.

The event is sponsored by the Department of Environmental Quality Pocatello Office and the Southeastern District Health Department. For more information, please contact Shannon Ansley at 208-236-6160.