

# Safe Well Water RI

Trusted, expert information

## Tip Sheet 19



*“Tip sheets helped us learn about our well water.”*

**Get Tip Sheets** at [www.riwelltesting.org](http://www.riwelltesting.org):

- 14 Tip Sheets about harmful substances
- 10 Tip Sheets about treatment choices
- 3 Tip Sheets about other topics of concern

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### Look for the NSF seal on water treatment devices.

NSF International is a non-profit group that sets performance standards for water treatment devices. Learn about NSF here: [www.nsf.org](http://www.nsf.org)

# “Bleaching” Your Well

## What does it mean to “bleach” my well?

**It means** using household bleach to kill germs (bacteria). You may also hear bleaching called:

- Shocking the well
- Shock treating the well
- Chlorinating the well
- Shock chlorinating the well
- Disinfecting the well

### Bleaching is used when:

1. You had your water tested and results show that germs (bacteria) are present in the water.
2. The well has been flooded by surface water.

When testing your water, use a State-certified testing lab.

Find a list of certified labs here:

[www.health.ri.gov/find/labs/privatewelltesting](http://www.health.ri.gov/find/labs/privatewelltesting)

### Before you bleach:

- Check your well to make sure there is no exposed or damaged wiring. If you notice damage, call a professional well or pump contractor. This person can also bleach the well for you.

Tip: If you are fixing a well (or installing a new one), use a registered well driller or pump installer. These experts know the rules and laws, and have passed a national exam. Find a list of registered well experts here: [www.riwelltesting.org](http://www.riwelltesting.org).

## Where can I call for information or help?

- » University of Rhode Island Water Quality Program  
Direct line to water expert: 401-874-5398  
[www.health.ri.gov/drinkingwaterquality](http://www.health.ri.gov/drinkingwaterquality)
- » Rhode Island Department of Health  
Ask for the Private Well Program: 401-222-5960  
[www.riwelltesting.org](http://www.riwelltesting.org)



## Directions to bleach your well

**Caution: After bleaching your well, you will not be able to use household water for any purpose for at least 12 hours.** So, plan ahead!

Before bleaching:

- Store extra water for washing in containers
- Buy bottled water for drinking and cooking.
- If you have a water treatment system switch it to “bypass.”

**Step 1 Get the materials you’ll need.** You can buy these easily.

- Household liquid bleach — unscented (no scent). Call us about how much bleach your well needs.
- Rubber gloves
- Goggles to protect eyes
- A funnel
- Old clothes

**Step 2 Part A: Attach a clean hose to an outside spigot** and run the water. If water is muddy or cloudy, let the water run through the hose until clear and free from particles.

**Part B: Turn the electricity to the pump OFF.** Do this before removing the well cap or cover to prevent an electric shock.

**Step 3 Pour the gallon of bleach into a 5 gallon bucket.** Wearing rubber gloves, goggles, and old clothes, add 2-3 gallons of water to the bucket to mix and dilute the bleach. Pour this into the well. How you do this depends on the type of well. Some wells have a sanitary seal with either an air vent or a plug that you can remove. With this type of opening, use the funnel to pour the bleach.

If you have a dug well, you can just lift off the cover and pour in the bleach.

**Step 4 Part A: Turn the electricity to the pump ON.** Run water from the outside hose into the well casing until you smell chlorine coming from the hose. Then turn off the hose.

**Part B: Run water from all inside (hot and cold) and outside faucets** until you can smell chlorine from each one. Then turn them off. Flush each toilet. If you have a water treatment system, make sure it’s switched to “bypass” before turning on indoor faucets. To disinfect appliances (dishwasher, clothes washer) contact the manufacturer.

**Step 5 Turn the electricity to the pump OFF.** Replace the well cover. Let the chlorinated water stand in the plumbing system for 12 to 24 hours. Do not run any water or flush toilets during this time. Use your reserves of fresh water for all purposes.

**Step 6 WAIT at least 12 hours before turning faucets back on.** Do not drink, cook, bathe, or wash with water from your faucets during this time because it has high amounts of chlorine in it.

**Step 7 Part A: Run water from the outside hose** until there is no longer a chlorine odor. Be sure to run it into a safe area where it will not get into plants, lakes, streams, or septic tanks. When odor is gone, turn the outside water off.

**Part B: Run water inside the house from all faucets** until there is no longer a chlorine odor. When the odor is gone, turn the water off. You can now drink the water and use it for other household purposes.

**IMPORTANT:** 7–10 days after you bleach, have your water tested for bacteria. Use a State-certified testing lab. Find a list here:

[www.health.ri.gov/find/labs/privatewelltesting](http://www.health.ri.gov/find/labs/privatewelltesting)

And remember, we’re here to help — water experts just a phone call away.

» University of Rhode Island Water Quality Program  
Direct line to water expert: 401-874-5398

» Rhode Island Department of Health  
Ask for the Private Well Program: 401-222-5960