

SUPPLEMENTAL COLIFORM INFORMATION

In October 2004, routine water quality samples in the Tumwater drinking water system tested positive for total coliform. *Coliforms are bacteria that are normally present in the environment and are used as an indicator that other, potentially harmful, bacteria may be present; coliforms were found in more samples than allowed and this is a warning of potential problems.* The samples, however, were immediately tested for the presence of harmful bacteria such as fecal coliform or *E. coli*. **No samples were found with fecal coliform or *E. coli* bacteria.**

By law, water utilities are required to provide notice within 30-days of finding total coliform in water quality samples. That notice is being mailed during the first week of November 2004.

The City of Tumwater is concerned about the health of its citizens and visitors and takes pride in the quality of the drinking water it provides. We are working hard to remove the bacteria detected in our water system, and also to find the cause or causes and correct them. Some questions you might have about the situation are answered below.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q. Is there fecal coliform or *E. coli* in the water?

A. No. None of the water samples has tested positive for fecal coliform or *E. coli* bacteria.

Q. Am I in the affected area?

A. If you receive water service from the City of Tumwater, you are in the affected area.

Q. If I live outside this area, should I be concerned?

A. If you received a letter from the City, you are in the affected area. If you receive water service outside of the identified area (see map – coming soon), please contact your water service provider for information pertinent to your system. If you have your own well, you may test it for coliform bacteria yourself. Thurston County has laboratory services, including sample bottles, available for this (360-786-5465).

Q. Do I need to boil my water or drink bottled water?

A. No. Because no harmful bacteria have been found in the water, the Department of Health does not require you to boil your water or use another source. People with severely compromised immune systems, infants, and some elderly may be at increased risk from coliform bacteria and may want to contact their health care provider for additional guidance.

Q. What are total coliforms?

A. Total coliforms are bacteria that are naturally present in the environment. They are found in the soil, lakes and rivers. They are also found in the digestive tracts of warm-blooded animals and humans. Total coliforms are used as an indicator that other, potentially harmful, bacteria may be present. While total coliform bacteria were found to be present in several water samples, *none of the water samples tested positive for potentially harmful bacteria, such as fecal coliform or *E. coli*.*

Q. Is the water safe to drink?

A. For most people, the water is safe to drink. People with healthy immune systems are exposed to total coliforms on a daily basis, as these coliforms are ever-present in our environment, and they do not get sick. People with severely compromised immune systems, infants, and some elderly may be at increased risk from coliform bacteria and may want to contact their health care provider for additional guidance.

Q. What caused the problem?

A. For now, we can only speculate about the cause of the problem. We are concentrating our investigation on several water system components, such as reservoirs, with direct influence on the areas where total coliform bacteria was found. Because total coliform bacteria are ever-present in our environment, it is very difficult to pinpoint the exact source.

Q. What are you doing to correct the problem?

A. City staff is continuously working to identify the source of the coliform bacteria. We want to identify the problem, correct it, and remove the existing bacteria in order to keep providing you with our high quality Tumwater drinking water. Public Works crews are installing equipment necessary to begin temporary chlorination with the aim of removing all of the coliform bacteria from the drinking water system. This will probably take about two months. As more information becomes available, staff will post updates on the website (www.ci.tumwater.wa.us) and inform local media, such as The Olympian.

Q. When will I know the problem has been fixed?

A. We will send a follow-up letter to customers, provide news releases to local media, and provide an update on the City website as soon as the issue has been resolved or more information is known.

Q. Does the City of Tumwater chlorinate the water system? Would it solve the problem?

A. We do not currently chlorinate the Tumwater water system. Chlorinating the system would not necessarily prevent this type of occurrence. Other water systems that do disinfect their water supply also experience occasional total coliform violations. However, the State does regard disinfection treatment as protection to help maintain good water quality.

Q. How frequently do you test the system?

A. We take 20-25 routine samples throughout the system every month and test for the presence of total coliforms. A total coliform non-acute violation means that at least two of our samples in one month test positive for total coliform bacteria.

Q. Will a water filter system remove this type of bacteria?

A. A filter system for your tap water generally will not remove coliforms. Filters that you attach to your faucet or keep in a water pitcher generally do not disinfect the water. They filter water through a media that is not fine enough to remove the bacteria.

**If you have further questions about this issue, please contact
Tumwater Water Resources at (360) 754-4140.**

