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## About one-fifth of wells contaminated

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More than 20 percent of private wells nationally and about 18 percent in Nebraska have at least one contaminant at a level that is considered a potential health concern, according to a new federal study.

The U.S. Geological Survey sampled about 2,100 private wells in 48 states for the study.

Jill Frankforter, a hydrologist with the Geological Survey office in Nebraska, said the sampling found that arsenic and bacteria were the most common contaminants.

According to the study, of the 136 Nebraska wells sampled:

- Thirteen wells exceeded standards for arsenic.
- Nine wells exceeded standards for bacteria (seven exceeded total coliform and two exceeded E. coli standards).
- Six wells exceeded the standard for uranium.
- Five wells exceeded the standard for nitrate.

The health risks of the contaminants vary, from potential intestinal problems from bacteria to cancer risks from uranium. Nitrate also is known to cause blue baby syndrome.

If these were municipal wells, the cities most likely would have to do additional testing and might eventually have to do something to address the problem, Frankforter said.

About 20 percent of Nebraskans, or 340,000 people, use well water, said Jack Daniel of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

Daniel said state health officials currently advise people to test their water for those things that can cause immediate illness -- bacteria and nitrate. Those tests, he said, cost about \$20 a year. More expensive testing for those things that can cause problems over a long period of exposure are advisable when there is a specific reason for concern, he said, such as a

chemical spill.

The wells also were tested for radon, Frankforter said. Depending upon which health standard is used, 58 percent of the wells, or none, exceeded potential standards.

Of the Nebraska wells sampled, nine were in the Platte River Valley and the rest were in the Ogallala Aquifer.