

731-4381  
731-4077

March 1, 2004

## **Interpretation of Coliform Test Results**

The microbiological, coliform, bacteriological, or potability test is performed on a sample of water to test for the presence or absence of coliform bacteria. The presence of coliform bacteria indicate that other disease causing organisms may be in the water and that it may be unsafe to drink.

If coliforms are found the lab will further analyze the sample to determine if fecal coliforms or *E.Coli* are present. Fecal coliforms and *E.Coli* are definite indicators that the water is unsafe to drink and that immediate action must be taken.

Compliance with Oregon's drinking water standards are determined by the results of routine and any repeat samples collected during a sampling period (a month or a quarter). For systems collecting less than 40 samples, if any two samples taken during the sample period have coliform bacteria then the system is in violation.

If the laboratory reports that the sample was too old (you only have 30 hours between collecting a sample and when it must be tested by the lab), leaked in transit or had "heavy non-coliform growth" you must send in another sample immediately. This is especially important if you collect your samples toward the end of the month or quarter. We can only credit samples collected IN the month or quarter for that month or quarter.

After being notified by your lab that coliforms are present in a sample you must in the next 24 hours or business day:

1. Contact the your local health department or the DHS-Drinking Water Program ((503)731-4317 in Portland, or (541)276-8006 in Pendleton) and tell them the details;
2. Collect 4 repeat samples (3 if you normally collect 2 or more routines a month); and
3. Take steps to locate and determine the cause of the coliform contamination and work to correct it.

The repeat samples must be collected: one at location of the positive sample, one within 5 connections upstream, one within 5 connections downstream of positive location, and one either at the source or else where in the system.

The month following the positive sample you need to collect at least 5 routines even if the repeats were all clean. If these 5 are clean, you return to your previous routine monitoring schedule.