

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS RELATED TO TOTAL COLIFORM IN YOUR WATER

QUESTION: WHAT IS TOTAL COLIFORM AND WHY DO I NEED TO BE NOTIFIED WHEN IT IS PRESENT IN THE DRINKING WATER?

ANSWER: Coliform is bacteria found within the digestive system of all mammals including human beings. Most coliform bacteria are naturally-occurring and are harmless to human beings. However, two forms of coliform bacteria; fecal coliform and E. coli are dangerous to human beings. The ingestion of these bacteria can result in serious illness and potential death under certain conditions. Common food poisoning is a result of E. coli or fecal coliform being present in a food or water source. Water systems use the presence of coliform in their water as a “marker” or “warning sign” of the *potential* presence of E. coli or fecal coliform. It requires the water system to perform further resampling and testing of the water. Bloomfield performed this re-testing with the results showing no coliform present. Fecal coliform or E. coli were never detected in any of the original sampling or resamples.

QUESTION: SHOULD I STOP DRINKING BLOOMFIELD WATER BECAUSE IT IS CONTAMINATED?

ANSWER: No. The water is not contaminated. The Township was non-compliant in the amount of samples tested for coliform. We are required as per EPA standards to take a minimum of fifty samples per month. Out of these samples, in any given month we must not yield more than two samples with coliform present. Most months we have zero (0) samples with coliform. July was an exception with five samples having coliform present. As previously indicated, none of these samples tested positive for E. coli or fecal coliform. As indicated in the public notice, certain individuals should consult their health care provider related to drinking the water. Unless you fit any of the categories of individuals listed in the Public Notice there is no reason to stop drinking Bloomfield water.

QUESTION: IF THE WATER IS SAFE TO DRINK, WHY AM I GETTING THIS NOTICE?

ANSWER: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires a water system provide this mandatory notice when a water standard is not met. As a customer and consumer of a product (in this case Bloomfield water) you have a right to know what is in the water you are consuming. Receiving this notice is not unlike reading the mandatory ingredient labels, nutritional information and warning labels that are placed on all food products purchased in the United States.

QUESTION: I GOT SICK IN JULY WITH SYMPTOMS CONSISTENT WITH FOOD POISONING. DID DRINKING BLOOMFIELD WATER CAUSE THIS?

ANSWER: Based upon our sampling and testing in July, no fecal coliform or E. coli bacteria were found to be present in the water. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that drinking Bloomfield water made you sick. Unfortunately, the presence of fecal coliform or E. coli is ubiquitous in a social society. These bacteria have been found in food preparation areas, public bathroom doors and fixtures, cell phone touchscreens, ATM machines, subway grab bars; it can be passed hand to hand through the transfer of paper or coin money; green leafy vegetables have been known to contain the bacteria as well as raw or undercooked ground beef. Bodies of water such as streams, rivers, oceans and even swimming pools can also contain the bacteria. The best way to prevent contacting these bacteria is to wash your hands after being in a public place and keeping your food preparation areas (counter, sinks, etc.) clean and disinfected. Please be assured, that if the township water department detects E. coli or fecal coliform in the water supply you will be notified within 24 hours or less upon confirmation of the presence of this bacteria.

QUESTION: HOW DID THE COLIFORM GET INTO THE BLOOMFIELD WATER SYSTEM?

ANSWER: There are a number of ways that coliform can get into the water distribution system: Major watermain breaks can cause zero or negative pressure within the system thereby drawing untreated water from the surrounding ground into the system; illegal or undetected cross-connections into the distribution system can also draw untreated water into the distribution system; the coliform can be from the actual water source; improper circulation of the water within the system can enhance growth of bacteria; a lack of sufficient chlorine in the water system can encourage the growth of bacteria. The township investigated the possibility that one of these scenarios occurred. All were eliminated in this particular case. In addition to these causes, contamination at the sampling site can result in the detection of coliform. Human error is also a possibility. A combination of these causes as well as warmer water during extremely hot days can also lead to an increased growth of bacteria.

QUESTION: WE RECEIVE OUR WATER FROM THE CITY OF NEWARK RESERVOIRS. IS THERE A PROBLEM WITH THEIR WATER?

ANSWER: No. All inquiries to the City of Newark Water Department indicated that the water coming out of the interconnections was appropriately chlorinated when it entered our system.

QUESTION: WHAT IS BLOOMFIELD DOING TO PERVENT THIS FROM HAPPENING AGAIN?

ANSWER: We purchase our water, fully treated, from the City of Newark. We therefore do not treat or disinfect our water. The most effective, immediate thing we can do is flush the system to eliminate the possibility of water containing coliform from remaining in the pipes. Hydrants are

flushed from the source, outward so that the freshly treated water at the interconnections is drawn into the system at a quicker pace. Once the coliform bacteria were detected and confirmed, the Engineering department ordered the immediate start of the fall hydrant flushing program. This program involves flushing a minimum of half of all the hydrants in the system as well as all dead-ends. Long term solutions to this problem involve capital improvements to the system. The Engineering Department will be starting a capital program this fall to eliminate some of the problematic, dead-ends in the system. Dead ends are locations where the water does not efficiently circulate through the system thereby creating areas where bacteria and other pollutants can potentially accumulate. We have also adopted a Water System Asset Management Plan that outlines specific programs, capital improvements and policies to maintain proper and appropriate drinking water standards for the township in the decades to come.

QUESTION: WHAT ASSURANCE CAN YOU GIVE ME THAT HIS WILL NOT HAPPEN AGAIN?

ANSWER: Unfortunately, as with any water system, there can be no guarantees that this will not happen again. A major water main break can occur at any time; the Newark water system can experience a problem; there can be a catastrophic weather event or any other such situation; human error during sampling and testing may occur. However, The Engineering Department can assure you that we continually sample and test our water in compliance with EPA standards. We continue to improve the system through capital programs in an effort to maintain the safety and quality of our water.

QUESTION: IS THER ANYTHING I CAN DO TO FEEL MORE CONFIDENT AND SAFE USING BLOOMFIELD WATER?

ANSWER: As a customer and consumer of our water, we welcome your input and observations related to the water you use. You are our first line of defense in detecting a problem within our distribution system. If you discover or notice any changes to the water such as discoloration, strange odor or taste, low pressure, etc., or if you have any questions related to the water, you should contact the Engineering Department at 973-680-4130 or preferably, via e-mail , directly to the Township Water Operator, Paul Lasek at [plasek@bloomfieldtwpnj.com](mailto:plasek@bloomfieldtwpnj.com). We will do our best to answer your questions in a timely manner.