



Pregnant? Bottle feeding? Drinking well water? Have your well water tested for nitrates.

Pregnant women and infants are highly susceptible to nitrates in well water. If you live near farm fields where anhydrous ammonia is spread, a concentrated animal feeding operation (CAFO), or the fields where CAFO manure is spread, you should be vigilant in having your well water tested.

Components of anhydrous ammonia fertilizer and manure can enter your well and contaminate your drinking water. One of those components - nitrates - can result in blue baby syndrome in infants when the contaminated water is used in formulas, which can lead to death or serious health issues.ⁱ

Further pregnant women who drink water contaminated with nitrates face an increased risk of giving birth to children with birth-defects, including neural tube defects, orofacial clefts, and limb deficiencies.

Rain water and snow melt carry nitrates from fields into the ground where it can enter your drinking water. Furthermore, CAFO waste pits can develop cracks that allow seeping into ground water. Nobody has responsibility for testing the ground water near a CAFO to determine if it has developed leaks. And nobody regularly inspects fields to ensure that the manure spread on them stays on the field and does not leach into your well water.

Play it safe and have your water tested every year for nitrates and coliform bacteria.ⁱⁱ The Environmental Protection Agency also recommends that you have the water tested for total dissolved solids and pH levels. Contact your county public health department to determine where to take your water for testing.

If your well is contaminated, find an alternate source of drinking water as soon as possible.

Play it safe and have your water tested every year.

ⁱ Blue baby syndrome is also called infant methemoglobinemia. The baby's skin around the mouth, hands, and feet turns blue because the nitrates cause a decrease in hemoglobin in the blood which reduces the amount of oxygen that is delivered to the baby's cells and tissues. Infants younger than three months have the highest risk.

ⁱⁱ The Iowa Department of Public Health tracks the number of wells that have tested positive for nitrates. See <https://hhs.iowa.gov/public-health/data/environment/well-water>