

April 2022 Private Well Water Focus Groups: Findings & Next Steps

Background:

On April 26th and 27th, 2022, the Division of Environmental Health Epidemiology at the Pennsylvania Department of Health conducted two virtual focus groups via Microsoft Teams with owners of private water wells. In total, 13 participants joined the focus groups, representing 12 counties (Allegheny, Bucks, Carbon, Crawford, Franklin, Lancaster, Luzerne, Northampton, Schuylkill, Somerset, Westmoreland, and York) in five regions of the state (SE, NE, NW, SW, and SC). The goal of these focus groups was to gain a greater understanding of private well water use among Pennsylvanians, including well owners' perception of the quality of their water, how they use it, and what well treatment methods and resources they utilize to ensure the health and safety of their water. To strengthen the state's capacity to respond to water-related issues, these focus groups provided private well water owners a platform to ask questions and voice their safety-related concerns. This work is part of a larger Centers for Disease Control and Prevention funded program to ensure safe water for private well owners, in collaboration with Penn State Extension (Grant #1NUE1EH001414-01-00).

Main Findings:

1. *Testing inconsistencies* – Participants differed in the types of tests they conducted and frequency of testing practices. For example, some participants tested their well water yearly, while others had not tested their water in over ten years.
2. *Concern of the unknown* – Many participants expressed concern that they did not know the contents of their water, what to test for, how often to test, or how to interpret test results.
3. *Financial barriers to clean water* – Some participants shared that they were deterred from accessing water testing and treatment systems due to high cost.
4. *Lack of resource awareness* – Many participants were unaware of available consultative resources when they had questions or concerns about their well water and shared interest in a statewide issued report on well water health and safety.

Limitations:

- Inability to generalize findings to all well water owners in Pennsylvania due to limited participants despite high interest – (over 30 individuals expressed interest and only 13 participated)
- Since participants were not required to answer every question, some opinions and concerns may have been unintentionally left out
- Restricted to participants with access to a computer or phone

Next Steps:

- Partner with local municipalities to promote well water safety and health education
- Consider working with a subject matter expert to listen in on the meetings and answer questions regarding testing, treatment methods, etc.
- Conduct additional focus groups (in person, if possible)
- Encourage the regulation of well water construction and quality on a state level