

## Contacting a Private Lab For a Bacteria Test

### Bacteria Testing with Well Educated

In Montana, mailing a water sample for bacteria to a testing laboratory always comes with risk of the sample arriving after the 30-hour hold time, which will make sample results less reliable.

Some Montana counties have high rates of mailed samples arriving at the lab past hold.

The Well Educated program provides sample testing for relatively low cost, so risk of a bacteria sample arriving past the hold time carries low financial risk if retesting is necessary.

If you are not confident the parcel service can deliver your sample in less than 30 hours, and/or you are highly concerned about your bacteria results, then working directly with a private lab and hand delivering your sample may be your best option.

### Locating a Certified Private Lab

There is a list of certified private labs on the Well Educated website. There are labs in Arlee, Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell, Lewistown, & Missoula. You can communicate directly with the labs to get sample bottles for a test. It is important to call the lab before delivering samples to get the most up to date information on: business hours, sample bottles, sampling instructions, and cost.

#### Scan for Certified Labs List:



<https://waterquality.montana.edu/well-ed/testing/certifiedlabs.html>

### Approach for Hand Delivering Bacteria Tests

1. Identify the closest lab to your location and obtain sample bottles from them.
2. The sample must be collected and delivered to the lab the same day, and many labs require sample drop off on a **Monday-Thursday** so they can be processed before the weekend.  
Plan a trip for in-person delivery. Do you have a trip planned to a city with a lab? Maybe a friend, family, or community member has a trip coming up? Combining sample drop off with a previously planned trip can be a good option.

### Hold Times

A “hold time” is the amount of time between sample collection and analysis. Bacteria tests will be more reliable if they reach the lab within 30 hours. Testing drinking water for the presence of Total Coliform and E. coli is a way to assess the risk that waterborne pathogens are present. These tests will only identify the presence of bacteria if they are alive in the sample. For this reason, it is important to get samples to the lab as quickly as possible after collection.