

Appendix 1:

Schools on Private Water Supplies

Most schools are supplied by public water which is provided by the relevant Local Authority who is also responsible for ensuring the quality of the water. If a school's water is supplied from a private well or small private group water scheme it is important that the school is sure that the quality of the water is satisfactory. A well that is used for the supply of water to a school is classed as a regulated supply and must comply with the requirements of SI No. 278, European Communities (Drinking Water) (No. 2) Regulations, 2007. The supply must be registered with the Local Authority and the water must meet the quality standards as laid out in these regulations.

Wells draw water from groundwater that can become polluted by chemicals and germs such as *E coli* and *Cryptosporidium*. Groundwater pollution has become an increasingly serious problem in Ireland. Even water from a deep well can become contaminated with faecal material. Water that changes in colour after heavy rainfall may indicate a significant risk of contamination. However, water can become polluted without any obvious change in taste, smell or colour.

Verocytotoxigenic *E coli* (VTEC) (see Chapter 9) is a particularly virulent gastrointestinal infection. Patients who become infected with VTEC are 3 or 4 times more likely to have consumed water from untreated well or other private water.

Private water supplies must be properly protected and treated. In general, continuous disinfection (for example with ultraviolet (UV) treatment) as opposed to sporadic disinfection is recommended. Treatment systems must be regularly maintained. In addition wells must be physically protected from contamination, for example, from surface water run-off, animal or human effluent, fertilizer, pesticides, or other chemicals.

If a school has any concerns about the quality of their water supply or queries about testing, treatment, or maintenance they should contact their local Environmental Health Officer or Local Authority.

Further information on private water supplies is available on the HPSC website at <http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/Gastroenteric/VTEC/VTECandwater/>