



January 2011

Coliform Bacteria

What are they?

Bacteria found in the fecal material of humans and other warm-blooded animals.

Why test for them?

Although coliform bacteria, by themselves are not disease causing (pathogenic), they are an indicator of the number of pathogenic organisms in the water.

If coliform bacteria counts are high in a surface water, a person swimming in that water has a greater chance of getting sick from swallowing the water, or from pathogens entering the body through cuts in the skin, the nose, mouth, or the ears. Diseases such as typhoid fever, hepatitis, gastroenteritis, dysentery, and ear infections can be contracted from waters with a high coliform bacteria count.



Where do they come from?

They enter surface waters with agricultural and stormwater runoff and improperly treated municipal wastewater. Specifically, concentrated animal feeding operations, pet wastes, and naturally occurring sources.



How can we prevent them from entering our surface waters?

Diverting runoff from rain and snowmelt around feedlots, picking up pet waste and properly disposing of it, and ensuring that our city's treatment systems and private septic systems are operating efficiently will help prevent surface water contamination.

For more information about the Nonpoint Source Pollution Management Program contact:

North Dakota Department of Health
918 East Divide Ave.
Bismarck, ND 58501-1945
Phone 701.328.5210
www.ndhealth.gov/wq