



Georgetown Water Department  
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## IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR DRINKING WATER

### Tests Showed Coliform Bacteria in Georgetown, MA Water System

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) issued an enforcement notice (NON-NE-15-5D015-CSA) to the Georgetown Water Department (GWD) on August 11, 2015. This enforcement action was taken because GWD reported a violation of the drinking water standard for Coliform bacteria beginning with a July 30<sup>th</sup> sample. We began investigating this issue on July 31<sup>st</sup>, and have taken actions to resolve the matter. A similar issue occurred in August thereby requiring MassDEP to issue a second enforcement notice (NON-NE-15-5D017-CSA) on August 31, 2015. Lab results from additional sampling at both locations confirmed that GWD has reestablished compliance. More information and a timeline is given below.

Although these two incidents were **not** emergencies, as our customers, you have a right to know what happened and what we did to correct these situations. We routinely monitor for drinking water contaminants. Of the 23 samples we took in July to test for the presence of coliform bacteria two samples tested positive. The standard is that no more than one sample per month may do so. In August, two of our 22 samples tested positive again.

#### What should I do?

You do **not** need to boil your water or take other corrective actions. However, if you have specific health concerns, consult your doctor.

People with severely compromised immune systems, infants, and some elderly may be at increased risk. These people should seek advice about drinking water from their health care providers. General guidelines on ways to lessen the risk of infection by microbes are available from EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1 (800) 426-4791.

#### What does this mean?

**This is not an emergency.** If it had been, you would have been notified immediately. Coliform bacteria are generally not harmful themselves. *Coliforms are bacteria which are naturally present in the environment and are used as an indicator that other, potentially-harmful, bacteria may be present. Coliforms were found in more samples than allowed and this was a warning of potential problems.*

Usually, coliforms are a sign that there could be a problem with the system's treatment or distribution system (pipes). Whenever we detect coliform bacteria in any sample, we do follow-up testing to see if other bacteria of greater concern, such as fecal coliform or *E. coli*, are present. **We did not find any of these bacteria in our subsequent testing, and further testing shows that this problem has been resolved.** GWD maintains a free chlorine residual throughout the distribution system to mitigate the growth of bacteria. However, excessive stagnation on dead-end water mains and limited water usage can increase the potential for some bacteria growth. GWD monitors the chlorine residual and other water quality parameters throughout the distribution system on a monthly basis to ensure that a chlorine residual is maintained.

#### What happened? What was done?

The specific timeline and description of events is as follows:

- 2001-2015 (July) – GWD has only one positive hit for Coliform bacteria in the distribution system over nearly 15 years.
- 2015-06-02 – Monthly bacteria sample at Penn Brook School (old building; kitchen sink; last sample before building demolition) shows no presence of Coliform bacteria.
- 2015-07-07 – Monthly bacteria sample at Penn Brook School (new building; kitchen sink) shows no presence of Coliform bacteria. Lab results negated because lab personnel ended the test at 22.5 hours incubation; test requires 24-28 hours.
- 2015-07-30 – Resampling of monthly bacteria sample at Penn Brook School shows a positive hit for Coliform bacteria. Prior to sampling, the only piping flushed was the school kitchen sink (sampling location).
- 2015-07-31 – GWD performs substantial flushing of yard piping and interior plumbing. Resampling of monthly bacteria sample at Penn Brook School shows a positive hit for Coliform bacteria. Samples taken at 62 Elm Street and 71 Elm Street show no presence of Coliform bacteria. This supports the idea that the problem is limited to the school. New interior plumbing was disinfected in January 2015; limited water use in building over the last 6 months.
- 2015-08-01 – Saturday; GWD could not gain access to school; limited outside flushing performed.
- 2015-08-02 – Sunday; GWD was able to gain access to school. GWD notifies Georgetown School Department (GSD) of the bacteria problem with the new school building.
- 2015-08-02 – GWD performs substantial flushing of yard piping and interior plumbing. Resampling of monthly bacteria sample at Penn Brook School shows no presence of Coliform bacteria. Samples taken from the hydrants at the front and rear of the school also show no presence of Coliform bacteria. This supports the idea that the issue was one of stagnation, as opposed to bacteria growth.
- 2015-08-11 – GWD performs substantial flushing of yard piping and interior plumbing prior to sampling. Monthly bacteria sample at Penn

Brook School shows a positive hit for Coliform bacteria.

- 2015-08-12 – Weekly school construction progress meeting. GWD advises GSD that additional measures must be taken to eliminate the bacteria problem in the school. All yard piping met GWD disinfection requirements previously. GWD observed all yard piping construction, disinfection, sampling, and testing. All parties agree that the interior building plumbing must be rechlorinated. GWD schedules EJ Prescott for 08/14/15.
- 2015-08-14 – EJ Prescott rechlorinates all interior building plumbing at Penn Brook School. Samples taken at kitchen sink and two outside hydrants. All samples show no presence of Coliform bacteria. This supports the idea that the long inactivity (6 months) with respect to the internal building plumbing appears to have created a stagnation of the water that lead to some bacteria growth in the plumbing. Complete disinfection and flushing of the internal plumbing was successful in eliminating the problem. GWD will work with GSD to mitigate this issue in the future.
- 2015-08-24 – Sampling of monthly bacteria sample at 1 Farm Lane (commercial building off Jackman Street) shows a positive hit for Coliform bacteria. Prior to sampling, the only piping flushed was the utility sink (sampling location).
- 2015-08-25 – GWD performs substantial flushing of Farm Lane water main and interior plumbing. Resampling of monthly bacteria sample at 1 Farm Lane shows no presence of Coliform bacteria. Samples taken at 3 Farm Lane and 63 Jackman Street show no presence of Coliform bacteria. Farm Lane has an 8-inch dead-ended water main with very low water demand. The building sampled uses very little water as well. These circumstances often lead to stagnation of the water and the potential for some bacteria growth in the plumbing.

For more information, please contact GWD as follows:

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*Please share this information with all the other people who drink this water, especially those who may not have received this notice directly (for example, people in apartments, nursing homes, schools, and businesses). You can do this by posting this notice in a public place or distributing copies by hand or mail.*

This notice is being sent to you by: Georgetown Water Department      PWS ID#: 3105000      Date distributed: 09/22/15