

Study Finds Viruses In Madison's Ground Water

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Untreated groundwater from two of three Madison wells sampled for the study... turned up five different viruses, that one public health director says *****could***** cause serious illness.

There are differing opinions about how serious this is.

Madison's Director of Public Health says we are all exposed to viruses and bacteria every day so there is no reason to be concerned. But the Board of Water commissioners questioned the director of public health from the Marshfield Clinic, who did the water study, he had a very different answer.

"Is this a public health threat? We don't know. We just don't know. If you look at the groundwater role and the EPA and the risk assessment modeling.... yeah. it is." Dr. Mark Borchardt told 27 News Tuesday.

Researchers sampled water from the aquifer, four to five hundred feet below ground. The aquifer has a natural clay filter, seven or eight feet thick, so scientists ***thought** the chance of finding contamination there was very slim.

Dr. Ken Bradbury, UW Extension Hydrologist told 27 News, "Our hypothesis was that we would not find any viruses, because they were thought to start at the surface and this water is pretty old, that we're getting down there. And we thought that they would be filtered out by the aquifer, and so finding them at all was quite a surprise to us. "

The researchers say the only possible source of the contamination is a sewer line leak. Dr. Borchardt said the right water treatment plan will kill 99 percent of the viruses.

Dr. Borchardt also said health effects from the viruses could range from a 24 hour flu, to possibly heart disease and diabetes, but again Madison's Director of Public Health says there ***is no reason to be concerned***.

The water samples were taken as part of a *****voluntary***** research project. The scientists involved say Madison's Water Utility should be commended for being proactive about water quality and allowing the study.

The results have national implications, because sewer leaks are common in municipalities and if viruses got inside Madison's aquifer, chances are other municipalities have the same problem.

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