

Urgent Action Needed to Address Known Contamination Issues in Private Wells



The screenshot shows the top of a Commonwealth Magazine article. The header includes the magazine's name, a search bar, and a 'DONATE' button. Below the header is a navigation menu with categories like TRANSPORTATION, EDUCATION, POLITICS, ENERGY, OPINION, HEALTH CARE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE, ARTS, and ECONOMY. The main article features a large image of a brass water faucet with the title 'Addressing the drinking water gap in Mass.' and a sub-headline 'Regulation of private wells falls short of standards for public drinking water' by Amie Shei. To the left of the main article are three smaller article teasers: 'Mass General Brigham withdraws suburban expansion plan', 'SJC places safeguards on use of cellphone 'tower dumps'', and 'Opioid overdose deaths remain stubbornly high'. To the right are three more teasers: '3 Walgreens in Roxbury, Mattapan closed for sanitary violations', 'Should remote access to government continue?', and 'Baker chief of staff Lepore leaving administration'. At the bottom right is a teaser for 'An international shout-out for Boston planning efforts'.

The Sunday edition of **CommonWealth Magazine** prominently featured a piece about longstanding inequities in access to safe drinking water across Massachusetts. The [op-ed](#), authored by Foundation President and CEO Amie Shei, PhD, highlighted disparities in the current system of drinking water protections whereby public water systems are regulated by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) and subject to routine monitoring for contaminants, while private wells for over 500,000 Massachusetts residents are not subject to any statewide requirements to ensure that the water is safe to consume. While local Boards of Health can enact their own regulations, many have no regulations or outdated regulations. Countless homeowners are unaware of the importance of verifying that private well water is safe to consume.

The op-ed cites the role of water treatment methods in dramatically reducing mortality in urban areas in the first part of the 20th century. Prior to water filtration, mortality rates were 30 percent higher in urban areas than in rural areas, a phenomenon often referred to as the “urban penalty,” in part because urban sewer systems commonly emptied near drinking water sources, resulting in waterborne diseases. One could argue that there is a **rural penalty** in Massachusetts today, with residents in more rural areas at greater risk of drinking contaminated water.

As state legislators consider whether to enable MassDEP to develop minimum statewide regulations to protect private well owners, they need to hear from their constituents that **promoting drinking water quality for all should be a priority this legislative session**. Delayed action means that many residents will unknowingly continue drinking contaminated private well water. The sooner the state legislature acts, the sooner MassDEP can begin gathering input and developing evidence-based standards aimed at protecting public health.

The pilot year of the Private Well Program to Protect Public Health, a Round 5 Synergy Initiative project, found that ~27% of wells tested had contaminants exceeding state health standards and/or suggesting potential health risks. Separately, MassDEP's ongoing PFAS Private Well Testing Program has found that ~5% of wells have PFAS exceeding the state's public drinking water standard. These figures demonstrate that the health risks are real, and urgent action is needed.

The legislature needs to hear from Massachusetts residents, including those on private wells and on public water systems, that this health inequity needs to be addressed. You can find your legislators [here](#) and send an e-mail, or you can visit www.whatsinyourwellwater.org for an e-mail template that can be edited and sent directly to your state senator and representative.

The Foundation has provided over \$1 million in funding to the [Private Well Program to Protect Public Health](#), led by RCAP Solutions, since 2020.

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