

Media Q & A 9.25.18

How and when was this discovered?

We take water samples at a variety of locations throughout town every two weeks. The tests indicating and confirming the presence of the bacteria were provided to the City by the MN Dept of Health on Saturday afternoon, September 22.

How did the City react? (meetings, who with, etc).

We have never had a positive confirmatory retest, so we immediately met with MN Dept of Health officials to determine next steps. We then developed a communications plan to disseminate the information to the affected residents and businesses. We pulled together members of our administration, public works, communications, and public safety departments, and provided notice to our mayor and city council members.

Who made the call to issue the advisory (City Admin, Mayor, MDH, or all of the above)

The Minnesota Department of Health requires an alert as soon as a positive sample is confirmed.

Were there any confirmed cases of residents sick from the contamination?

We are not aware of any confirmed cases.

What were your biggest challenges?

Since we've never had a positive test before, we were immediately concerned with getting the information out to as many people as possible in a timely manner.

From a system operations perspective, we followed procedure as quickly as possible to disinfect the system. It took a lot of people working around the clock to get it done quickly and effectively. We estimate over 100 hours of Public Works staff time were put into this effort over the weekend. We were pleased that we were able to complete all required steps and provide safe water again so quickly.

What did the City learn from this situation?

We are conducting a post-event debrief of the situation right now.

What is the MDH tolerance for E.coli levels per test?

The MDH has a zero tolerance for E. coli, meaning and the test results are conveyed as "present" meaning positive, or "absent" meaning negative for each sample tested.

What are the physical steps that will be used to determine the cause of the elevated test and how will this be accomplished?

The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) will be conducting what is called a Revised Total Coliform Rule Level 2 Assessment Form to go through a series of inspections and investigations with us. The outcome of that work will be summarized by the MDH in a report that will give their conclusions and recommendations for the City of Hastings going forward. The MDH expects that report to be furnished by next week.

For the time being, we've chosen to provide a low level of chlorination to the affected area of the system to provide an added layer of assurance that the system will remain clean, and we'll make a determination with the Department of Health as to whether we do this on a full-time basis, based on their recommendations. Many cities provide ongoing full-time chlorination of their systems in this way. Hastings has not been previously required by the Department of Health to provide chlorination of its system based on performance and testing history.

As the testing is every 2 weeks, is there a protocol for more frequent testing immediately after a positive test?

The MN Dept of Health requires us to provide 26 total sample tests on a monthly basis. However, we voluntarily choose to provide 13 samples, twice a month, for increased frequency of monitoring of our city water system.

After an incident is resolved, there is no requirement for increased monitoring, but most systems will do some additional monitoring on their own. As we work through the investigation process with MDH, the City is going to pull water samples for a temporary increase in frequency of bacteria testing for monitoring purposes.