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Water quality suspect

TRACY KIBBLE
Staff Reporter

The water you drink could be hazardous to your health — it might even be killing you.

People who are not hooked up to communal water systems, and who rely on drinking water from private wells, are at greater risk of contracting a host of diseases, including gastric cancer and blue baby disease, if tap water is not properly and regularly tested.

Residents at Musselman Lake and other kettle lake citizens should especially take note since reports have already indicated high nitrate levels which are spreading at a rapid pace.

A 1990 report by town consulting engineers, Giffels Associates Ltd. and Architects, entitled Ballantrae/Musselman Lake Water Works Project states:

"Twenty-four per cent of private wells in Musselman Lake did not meet the drinking water standards for nitrate concentrations and some had elevated nitrate values."

That was nearly four years ago so the numbers are expected to be significantly higher with the continued absence of a communal water system in the Musselman Lake and Ballantrae areas.

According to J. N. Bishop, vice president of Environmental Protection Laboratories Inc. in Toronto, and a former director of water resources for Ontario's environment ministry:

"Canada has some serious problems with its municipal water supplies and has no framework to correct the problems.

"Canada doesn't have legally binding standards for drinking water...instead we have guidelines that are established by the federal government, and which have no legal status," the former civil servant said.

In the 82 square miles that make up Whitchurch-Stouffville, about 50 per cent of the community's nearly 7,000 single family dwellings rely on private (dug or drilled) well systems.

The water these people use every day to make coffee, baby formula and prepare meals could contain high levels of nitrate or sodium - highly toxic and potentially fatal substances if ingested over long periods of time, studies have proven.

Ingesting sodium, nitrate or a host of other harmful bacteria through tap water leaves people susceptible to human disease such as typhoid fever, diarrhea and a variety of intestinal diseases, including a type of blood disease known as methemoglobinemia which is "weakly" linked to drinking contaminated water, states a health department booklet entitled, Well Water Supply Information.

There has already been two confirmed typhoid fever cases in this vicinity from 1991 which are government-acknowledged and which are on file with the health ministry's Reportable Communicable Diseases report.

"Drinking water with levels of nitrate at or greater than 10 milligrams per litre should not be consumed regardless of age. New research information obtained from the Ministry of Health indicates a weak association between gastric cancer and high levels of nitrate in drinking water," York Region's health department warns.

Boiling water only increases the levels of nitrate and other bacterias and is not a safe alternative, studies have proven.

The disease methemoglobinemia attacks and alters the amount of the oxygen-carrying pigment and protein source of the blood called hemoglobin. Nitrates poison the hemoglobin which could result in a symptom known as cyanosis — a bluish discoloration of the skin due to a lack of or reduced hemoglobin in the blood.

This is more commonly referred to the often-fatal 'blue baby' disease because it attacks infants and shows up much quicker than in adults.

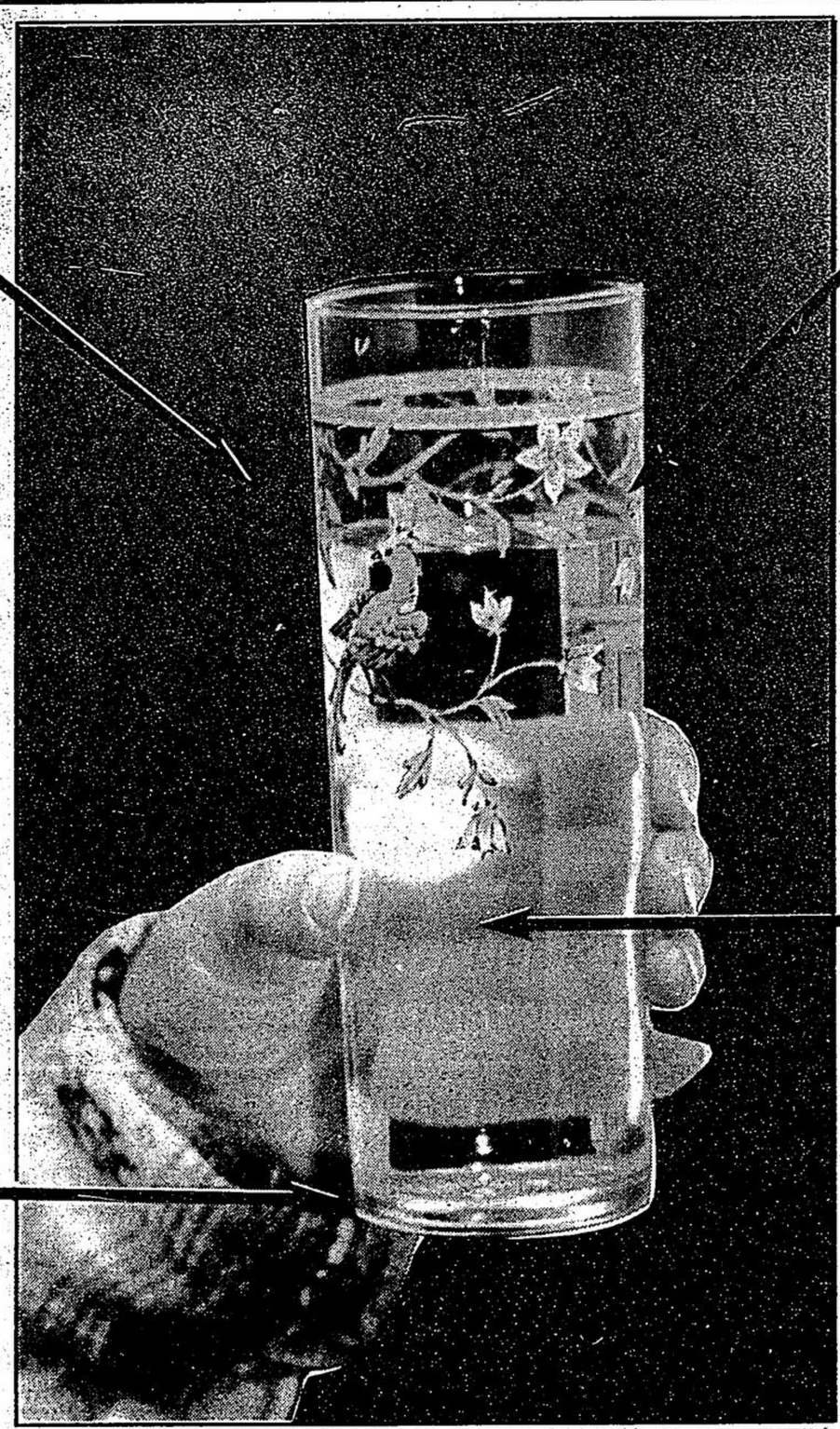
"When formula made with water that contains too much nitrate is given to a baby or if a baby is given water to drink which contains too much nitrate, a chemical change takes

(Please see page 2)

~ What's in *your* drinking water? ~

NITRATE?
~ compound used in fertilizers, dyes, etc.

FAECAL COLIFORM?
~ bacterial breakdown of raw sewage



Photo/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

SODIUM?
~liquidized crystalline salt used in fertilizer

COLIFORM?
~ bacterial breakdown of human or animal waste

Is your tap water polluting your body with dangerous chemicals? About half of Whitchurch-Stouffville's 7,000 homeowners rely on private well systems for their drinking water supplies and are at greater risk of contracting a number of diseases.

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