



BOARD OF HEALTH

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Welcome to the Town of Harvard! We are happy that you've chosen to live here.

One of the goals of the Harvard Board of Health is to make sure that you have the tools you need to be healthy in your new home. This document only covers a few of the most frequent questions; please feel free to contact the Board of Health about other public health topics, including:

Information on additional community health-related topics such as trash and recycling, hazardous waste collection sites, disposal of syringes and medicines, mosquito & ticks, stable permits, PFAS, including near the former Ft Devens, and social services can be accessed through the Harvard Board of Health's website at <https://www.harvard-ma.gov/board-health>.

We will cover three topics in this document, as they tend to raise the most questions for newcomers.

1. Private Wells
2. Septic Systems
3. Harvard Board of Health and the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health

It is important to be familiar with private wells and septic systems, and how they are installed and operate. The Board of Health (BoH) is responsible for overseeing these systems and should be notified if you are experiencing related problems in your home.

Private Wells

The majority of houses in Harvard get their water from a private well. Unlike those who receive the water from the Harvard Water Department or a public water supply, you are responsible for ensuring your water is safe for consumption. Many individuals may be unaware of the condition of their well or of the quantity or quality of the water it supplies. Harvard requires private wells be sampled for water quality in anticipation of home sale. If your broker did not provide you with a copy of the water quality test for your property, reach out to the Harvard Board of Health to see if we have a copy of a recent report on file.

Well types: There are three basic well types in this region. The first is an artesian or drilled well; this type of well is drilled into the water bearing zones in the bedrock and is generally signified by a 6" steel pipe protruding from the ground in your yard. A point, or driven, well is generally pounded or driven through the sandy gravel soil deposit into the groundwater which becomes

the source of water delivered to your house. Third, depending on the age of your property, you may have a shallow or dug well. As the name implies, these wells are dug into the soil until groundwater is encountered. The hole is then lined with stone or concrete; groundwater serves as the source of water for this type of well. Regardless of the well type, you should avoid storage of hazardous materials in the area around the well and make sure this area is graded to prevent the ponding of surface water around the well. Use care when applying lawn care products around your well.

Water testing: If you have a private well, you are responsible for testing your water to ensure it is safe to drink. Water should be tested at a Massachusetts certified laboratory. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) website (provided below) contains a link to the laboratory currently certified. You should be wary of free water testing kits left in your mailbox or offered at big box hardware stores.

How often should you test your well water? The MassDEP website (linked below) provides a schedule of water quality parameters to be tested and frequencies for testing. Other reasons you may consider testing are: a noticeable change in the water quality (smell, taste, or color) or quantity, illness in your family that may be attributed to drinking water, or the location of your well relative to areas of suspected contamination.

As the owner of a private well, you are responsible for ensuring your household's drinking water is safe. The links below can provide you with information to assist you in that task. If you have questions regarding your well or water quality or have questions about how to read a water quality analysis, you can also contact our office and speak to Harvard's Health Agent.

Further Information:

<https://www.harvard-ma.gov/board-health/pages/water-quality>

<https://www.mass.gov/private-wells>

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/protect-your-family-a-guide-to-water-quality-testing-for-privatewells>

<https://www.epa.gov/privatewells>

Septic Systems

The Harvard Board of Health maintains files on properties in Harvard that have sewage disposal systems.

A sewage disposal system consists of a series of components designed to handle the wastewater from your home and/or your business. The system consists of a septic tank and a leaching area to discharge the settled wastewater into the ground. If your leaching area is elevated higher than your septic tank, a pump chamber and pump is installed to send the wastewater to the leaching field and there is an alarm to notify you if there is an issue with the pump. You may have a treatment tank if your system is in an environmentally sensitive area.

Operation and Maintenance: All sewage disposal systems require maintenance, and the level of maintenance depends on the type of system, the size of the system and the use.

- Pump your septic tank regularly, approximately every three (3) years depending on use
- Don't dispose of grease, cat litter, wipes or hazardous materials down the drain
- If your system has a filter, clean the filter regularly
- Maintain service contracts, required for tight tanks and some Innovative and Alternative septic systems. Contact the Board of Health with questions.
- Information on how to care for your septic system can be found at: <https://www.mass.gov/guides/caring-for-your-septic-system>
- Septic systems that include a sewer line that is longer than 100 feet may be subject to erosion or clogging of leaching fields and sewer lines by root infiltration from vegetation, resulting in premature system failure. Homeowners are required to (1) conduct an annual inspection of the septic system and report to the Board of Health in the month of October (2) maintain proper vegetation so as to reduce the likelihood of erosion, and (3) prevent the growth of vegetation that could infiltrate the system components and effectively disable the proper functioning of the system.

Ownership: the property owner is responsible for the operation and maintenance of a septic system; in homeowner associations or condominium trusts, the Association or Trust is responsible.

System issues or signs of failures:

- Slow draining plumbing or back-ups
- Sewage odors
- Standing water on top of the leaching area
- Lush growth over the system

Inspections and Repairs: 310 CMR 15.000: Septic Systems (Title 5) requires that a septic system be inspected upon the transfer of a property. Title 5 inspections determine the condition of the system and whether repair or replacement is needed. The inspection reports are sent to the Board of Health. Title 5 Inspectors must be licensed by the Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP). You can find a list of licensed installers at: <https://neiwpc.org/our-programs/wastewater/mass-title-5/listings-of-approved-system-inspectors-and-soil-evaluators/>.

Further Information:

<https://www.harvard-ma.gov/board-health/pages/subsurface-sewage-disposal-systems>

Nashoba Associated Boards of Health (NABH)

The town of Harvard contracts with Nashoba Associated Boards of Health (NABH) for its environmental and community health nursing services. NABH is a 16-town, regional, public health district. NABH's Environmental Engineers (sometimes referred to as health agents or sanitarians) are responsible for the permitting of any septic systems and private wells installed in the town of Harvard.

As a part of the public health services, NABH offers monthly Well Adult clinics (where adult residents can have a basic health screening and consult with their town nurse) and various health education programs. Harvard residents can call NABH during business hours to consult with the town nurse on health-related issues and concerns. If you are diagnosed with a communicable disease that is reportable under MA State Law, a public health nurse may contact you to conduct a case investigation. Visit the NABH website to learn more about the services available: www.nashoba.org.

The Board of Health

The Harvard Board of Health is made up of three volunteer residents, appointed by the Select Board, and one part-time assistant who works Tues -Thursday. Please remember that Harvard Town Hall is closed on Fridays and all public holidays. If the Harvard Board of Health office is closed, you can contact the Health Agent at the Nashoba Associated Boards of Health. For an urgent matter over the weekend, the Board of Health members can be reached by email – their email addresses are hyperlinked under their names on the Board of Health webpage.

The Board of Health sends out information and alerts through the Town's website. Information can include notice of upcoming informational forums to results of testing the Town Beach for harmful algal blooms. Please sign up to get this information.

- Go to www.harvard-ma.gov/subscribe
- Under "Urgent Alert" and under "News or Announcement" select "Board of Health"

Contact information

Administrative Assistant, Alison Flynn Harvard Board of Health's Office Hours

Tuesdays: 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Wednesdays: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Thursdays (via e-mail): 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Email: boh@harvard-ma.gov

Phone: 978-456-4100x328

Health Agent, Jim Garreffi, Registered Sanitarian Harvard Town Hall Hours

Tuesdays & Thursdays: 8 a.m. to 9 a.m.

Contact Information at NABH:

Email: jgarreffi@nashoba.org

Phone: 978-772-3335, ext. 305

Emergency After Hours: 800-698-3307

Occasionally the Board of Health and NABH offices may be closed for inspections, meetings, etc. Please consider calling first before making a visit either office.