

# KNOW THE FACTS!

## WHY MAINTAIN YOUR HOUSEHOLD SEWAGE TREATMENT SYSTEM

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*Failing household sewage treatment systems can cause untreated sewage to pond on the ground's surface where it can pose a risk to children and pets and provide a breeding place for flies, mosquitoes and other disease carriers.*

### Why is it important to maintain my household sewage treatment system?

Wastewater treatment consists of a combination of processes that remove, kill or "inactivate" a large portion of pollutants and disease-causing organisms in wastewater. Failing systems can cause untreated sewage to pond on the ground's surface where it can pose a risk to children and pets and provide a breeding place for flies, mosquitoes and other disease carriers. Groundwater can also be polluted by failing systems, which can then contaminate nearby water sources (streams, ponds, rivers) and drinking wells.

### What is wastewater?

Wastewater from a typical household includes toilet waste; used water from sinks, baths, showers, washing machines and dishwashers (grey water); and anything else that can be put down the drain or flushed down the toilet.

### What makes wastewater dangerous?

Feces and urine from both humans and animals carry many disease-causing organisms (pathogens). When groundwater, rivers, streams, lakes or ponds are contaminated with wastewater, humans can be exposed to pathogens in lots of ways. Wastewater can also contain harmful chemicals and heavy metals known to cause a variety of environmental and health problems.

### How can I get sick from wastewater?

Pathogens in wastewater can be transmitted to humans in several ways.

1. *Direct contact with sewage* - playing, working or walking in a yard with failed household sewage system; swimming in water (pond, lake, etc.) contaminated with sewage
2. *Fecal-oral route* - drinking water contaminated with sewage or eating food prepared or washed in contaminated water; not washing hands after contact with sewage, water contaminated with sewage, or a surface (ball, pet toy, tool) contaminated with sewage.
3. *Contact with human, animal or insect carriers* - eating food improperly handled by an infected person.



**HAMILTON COUNTY  
PUBLIC HEALTH**

PREVENT. PROMOTE. PROTECT.

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## KNOW THE FACTS!

### HSTS MAINTENANCE (cont.)

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#### The Housefly Example

Flies have tastebuds on their feet and always land directly on the food they eat. This could mean raw sewage, followed by your picnic lunch. Pathogens carried on the fly's body hairs and feet are then transferred to the food and consequently to you.

#### Other important reasons to maintain your system:

- *Money* - Poor maintenance is a common cause of early system failure. The minimal amount of preventive maintenance a septic system requires costs very little compared to the cost of repair and replacement.
- *Economic Health of Community* - Failed septic systems lower property values and contribute to the pollution of local rivers, lakes, and ponds used for commercial or recreational activities.

#### How can I tell if my system is failing?

*If you have a septic tank or secondary treatment device (leachfield, subsurface sandfilter, mound)* - survey your property regularly. If you notice any of the following, contact a pumper or contractor registered with the Health District. Visit [www.hamiltoncountyhealth.org](http://www.hamiltoncountyhealth.org) for a list of registered contractors.

- Sewage backup into the home.
- Smell of sewage outside the house. If the smell is more noticeable after a lot of water has been put into the system—multiple showers or several loads of laundry—this may be an indication the secondary treatment device is failing.
- Smell accompanied by a “spongy or soggy” feel in the area of your yard where the system is located (near the leach field, distribution box, or septic tank). This “spongy or soggy” feel may be caused by water and waste being pushed to or near ground level. These areas often have greener grass and grow quicker than other parts of the yard.
- Ponding water or a “breakthrough or bleed out” is a positive indication of failure of one or more parts of the system. Any applicable discharge pipe has a black or grey discharge.

*If you have a home aeration unit* - know how your particular system operates. Recognize how it looks, sounds, and smells when working correctly. If you notice any of the following, contact a contractor/repairer registered with the Health District. Call (513) 946-7862 for a list of registered contractors, or use our searchable database, located on our Web site, [www.hamiltoncountyhealth.org](http://www.hamiltoncountyhealth.org).

- Motor is not running or there are no noticeable signs of aeration occurring.
- Strong sewage odor. A properly working system may have a musty or earthy smell, but should not smell like sewage or be over-powering.
- Identify and survey where your system discharges. Effluent should be clear.

*For more information, call the Water Quality Division at 513.946.7862 or visit [www.hamiltoncountyhealth.org](http://www.hamiltoncountyhealth.org).*



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