

BOIL WATER ADVISORY

Frequently Asked Questions



GENERAL

1. Why do I have to boil my water?

A "Boil Water Advisory" is a notification issued by your local community as a precautionary measure. Boil water advisories are distributed if there is actually or the possibility of microbiological contamination in the drinking water system that could make you sick.

2. Where can I get more information?

- www.cdc.gov (Personal Water Use, Hygiene and Sanitation, A Guide to Water Filters)
- EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline 1-800-4264791

3. Who should I call with questions specific to this Boil Water Advisory?

Please contact the person listed on the Boil Water Advisory for specific details regarding this advisory.

4. How do I disinfect my water if I cannot boil my water and do not have bottled water?

Using a clean, sanitized container, disinfect tap water by adding 8 drops, about 1/8 teaspoon, of plain unscented household bleach to a gallon of water. Thoroughly mix the solution and allow the water to stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy, repeat the process. Use a container with a cap or cover for disinfecting and storing water to be used for drinking. This will prevent re-contamination.

5. What if I have already consumed potentially contaminated water?

Even if someone has consumed potentially contaminated water before they were aware of the boil water advisory, the likelihood of becoming ill is low. Anyone experiencing symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, with or without fever, should contact their healthcare provider. Symptoms associated with waterborne illness are also associated with foodborne illness, or even the common cold. Most of these illnesses are not usually serious or life threatening except in the elderly, the very young or those with compromised immune systems.

6. Should I use bottled water during a Boil Water Advisory?

Water from a safe alternative water source is the best option during a boil water advisory. When bottled water is available, it is a good alternative to boiling water. Bottled water should be used for drinking, making ice, washing dishes, brushing teeth, and preparing food until further notice.

HYGIENE

7. Is potentially contaminated water safe for bathing and shaving during a Boil Water Advisory?

The water may be used for showering, baths, shaving and washing, but don't swallow water or allow it to get in your eyes, nose or mouth. Children and disabled individuals should have their bath supervised to make sure water is not ingested. Minimize bathing time. Though the risk of illness is minimal, individuals who have recent surgical wounds, have compromised immune systems, or have a chronic illness may want to consider using bottled or boiled water for cleansing until the advisory is lifted. People at increased risk should seek advice about drinking water from their health care provider.

8. Can I use tap water to brush my teeth?

No. Do not use tap water to brush your teeth. Use bottled water or water that has been boiled or disinfected as you would for drinking.

9. How should I wash my hands during a Boil Water Advisory?

Vigorous handwashing with soap and your tap water is safe for basic personal hygiene. However, if you are washing your hands to prepare food, you should use boiled (then cooled) water, disinfected or bottled water with handwashing soap. It is also acceptable to use waterless antiseptic hand-sanitizers available in gels or foams.

10. Is potentially contaminated water safe for washing dishes or clothes?

Yes, if you thoroughly rinse hand washed dishes for a minute in a bleach solution (1 tablespoon bleach per gallon of water). Allow dishes to completely air dry. Most household dishwashers don't reach the proper temperature to sanitize dishes or use the sani-cycle (heated water cycle) on your dishwasher. It is safe to wash clothes in tap water.

11. What should I do about feeding my baby during a Boil Water Advisory?

During a Boil Water Advisory, mothers who are breastfeeding should continue to breastfeed their babies. Per the CDC, wash and sterilize all baby bottles and nipples before each use. If this is not possible, then single-serve, ready to feed bottles of formula must be used with a sterilized nipple. Always boil water before mixing concentrated liquid or powdered formula. If unable to boil water, water may be disinfected as described for drinking.

FOOD & DRINK

12. What is the proper way to disinfect my water so it is safe to drink or prepare other drinks like baby bottles, drink mixes, tea, frozen juices, etc.?

The best method of treatment is boiling. Boiling water kills harmful bacteria and parasites that may be in the water (freezing will not disinfect water). Per the EPA, bring tap water to a full rolling boil for at least 1 minute to kill most infectious organisms (germs). Cool before using.

13. Can I use my coffee maker, ice machine, water or soda dispenser?

Do not use if they are directly connected to your water supply. Use bottled water or water that has been boiled or disinfected for making coffee and ice. Also, filters don't work for removing bacteria. Once you have been notified that the boil water advisory has been lifted, these devices should be cleaned, disinfected and flushed according to the operator's manual for the device.

14. What do I do with food and drink prepared during the Boil Water Advisory?

Throw away uncooked food, beverages or ice cubes if made or prepared using tap water during the day(s) of the advisory.

15. How should I wash fruit, vegetables, and food preparation surfaces or make ice?

Wash fruit and vegetables with boiled (then cooled water) or bottled water or water sanitized with 8 drops (about 1/8 teaspoon) of unscented household bleach per gallon of water. Also, use boiled water, or a bleach-based spray disinfectant to wash surfaces where food is prepared. Ice should be made with boiled water, bottled water or disinfected water.

COMMERCIAL / INDUSTRIAL

16. What should those in the food/beverage service industry do during a Boil Water Advisory?

For businesses using water for cooking, drinking, and making soft drinks, coffee, tea etc., bottled water or boiled water for cooking and cleaning any food products should be used. All ice made should be discarded. Restaurants should serve bottled water.

Any food or beverage manufacturer that uses water for production should discard any food or beverage product that comes in contact with or was produced during the advisory. They should discontinue production until the advisory is lifted unless they have an alternate clean water source. They should notify their local health department for instructions.

17. What should be done about beverages made with piped in water – including post mix carbonated beverages, auto-fill coffee makers, instant hot water dispenser, juice, tea, etc.?

Discontinue use of post-mix carbonated beverage machine, auto-fill coffee makers, instant hot water heaters, etc. using auto-fill until Boil Water Advisory has been lifted. Remove and replace any filters that may have been connected to water lines.

18. What should be done about ice during a Boil Water Advisory?

- Discontinue routine methods of making ice until the advisory is lifted.
- Use commercially manufactured ice from an unaffected water supply.
- Discard existing ice made after the advisory and clean and sanitize ice bins.

19. What about food products requiring water?

- Discard any ready-to-eat food prepared with water prior to the advisory or incident.
- Prepare ready-to-eat food using commercially bottled or boiled water.

20. What alternatives are there for washing/soaking produce?

- Do not use tap water for washing/soaking produce.
- Use pre-washed packaged produce
- Use frozen/canned fruits and vegetables
- Wash fresh produce with boiled, commercially bottled water, or safe potable water hauled from an approved supplier from another unaffected public water supply system.

21. Can tap water be used to thaw frozen foods?

- Do not use tap water to thaw frozen foods.
- Thaw only in the refrigerator, or microwave as part of the cooking process.

22. Can tap water be used when cooking food?

- Use commercially bottled water.
- Use water that has been at a rolling boil for at least one minute.
- Haul water from an approved public water supply in a covered sanitized container.
- Arrange to use a licensed drinking water tanker truck.

23. Can tap water be used by employees of a food facility for handwashing?

- The best practice is to use only boiled, bottled or treated water for handwashing.

24. Can patrons use tap water in the restrooms during a boil water advisory?

- Patrons may use tap water for handwashing provided that hand sanitizer is made available at each sink. Extra caution should be taken when caring for the very young, sick or elderly.
- Post a notice advising patrons not to use tap water for drinking or for brushing teeth.

25. What about cleaning and sanitizing utensils and tableware?

- Use disposable, single-use utensils and tableware.
- Food equipment, such as meat slicers, should be used only one time when it is practical to properly clean and sanitize the equipment.
- Use of automatic dish washing machines that utilize high temperature for sanitization may be appropriate, provided the equipment is properly maintained, the sanitization step is being properly conducted (sanitizer concentration/temperature) and can be verified.

26. Can Spray Misting Units be used?

- Spray misting units used to spray produce, seafood, meat cases, etc. cannot be used.
- Discard any foods exposed to misters after the advisory was issued or any that may have been exposed to contaminated water prior to the advisory.
- Discontinue use of misters until the advisory is lifted.

MISCELLANEOUS

27. Is potentially contaminated water safe for household pets?

The same precautions that are taken to protect humans should be applied to household pets. If the animal's water needs to be changed use boiled or bottled water.

28. Is it safe to water my garden, lawn and houseplants?

Yes, you can use the tap water for your garden, lawn and household plants.

29. Can I use tap water to fill my swimming pool?

It is safe to fill your pool with tap water and let the pool chemicals do their work, but do not use pool water for drinking or cooking.