

Boil Water Advisory - Frequently Asked Questions for Residents and Homeowners

Protecting your family, yourself and others from potentially contaminated drinking water takes some thought and effort. Questions from residents and homeowners about how to do this often arise during a boil water event. The following pages provide answers to some questions you may have.

Q1 - Why was a boil water notice issued for my water?

A boil water notice is issued by water utilities or health agencies as a precaution to protect consumers from drinking water that may have been contaminated with disease causing organisms (also called pathogens). Boil water notices are typically issued when an unexpected condition has caused a potential for biological contamination of water in a public water system. Common reasons for a boil water notice include loss of pressure in the distribution system, loss of disinfection, and other unexpected water quality problems. These often result from other events such as water line breaks, treatment disruptions, power outages and floods.

The reason for your boil water notice should be included in the notification.

Q2 - How long will the need to boil water continue?

Public notification will be given when the boil water notice is lifted. Typically a boil water event lasts for 24 to 48 hours, but this can be longer and the need to boil water may last for several days or more. How long depends on the conditions that caused the need to boil, how quickly the conditions can be corrected, and how long it takes for laboratory results to confirm that your water is again ready to drink.

Q3 - How do I boil my water so that it is safe to drink?

Bring water to a **FULL ROLLING BOIL for 1 MINUTE**, then allow the water to **COOL BEFORE USE**. Because water may take 30 minutes to cool, plan ahead. Make up a batch of boiled water in advance so you will not be tempted to use it hot and risk scalds or burns. Boiled water may be used for drinking, cooking, and washing.

Here's an easy way to remember...ROLL for ONE then COOL.

Q4 - What if I have a water pitcher/dispenser with a filter?

Most of these units are not capable of removing pathogens, including viruses, bacteria, and protozoa. The few that are designed to do so, may still require disinfection to address viruses and must be properly operated and diligently maintained to ensure effective treatment. It is recommended that you use boiled (and then cooled) water or an alternate source such as bottled water.

Q5 - Can I use my water for cooking?

No, any water used for food preparation or cooking needs to be from an acceptable alternate source such as bottled water or boiled first.

Q6 - What if I am boiling my water as part of the cooking process?

It is more protective to boil the water first, to prevent the potential for inadequate heating. The cooking process should bring the water to a full rolling boil for at least one minute before adding the food item (for example, making pasta). If the water will be at a slight boil for a long time, then this will also be protective. For example, you may be cooking beans or boiling chicken for 10 - 20 minutes.

Q7 - How should I wash fruit and vegetables and make ice?

Fruits, vegetables, and any other foods that will not be cooked should be washed and rinsed with boiled (and then cooled) water or water from an acceptable alternate source such as bottled water. Similarly, ice should be made with either boiled water or water from an acceptable alternate source such as bottled water.

Q8 - Can I use my water for making baby formula or drinks?

No, not without precautions! Any water used for baby food, formula, or making beverages must be boiled (and then cooled) or be from an acceptable alternate source such as bottled water.

Q9 - Is potentially contaminated water safe for washing dishes?

Hand-washed dishes: No! Use boiled (then cooled) water, water from an alternate source (bottled water), or after washing with dish detergent rinse for a minute in a dilute bleach (1 tablespoon of unscented bleach per gallon of water). Allow dishes, cutlery, cups, etc. to **completely air dry** before use.

Home dishwasher: Yes, if the hot wash is at least 170o F and includes a full dry cycle. However, most home dishwashers do not reach this temperature. If you are uncertain of the temperature of your dishwasher, rinse in dilute bleach and **completely air dry** as described for hand washed dishes.

Commercial dishwasher: Yes, if it is a NSF listed washer and manufactured and operated with a heat sanitizing rinse set at 170oF that lasts for at least 30 seconds. Additional information on commercial dishwashers can be found in the fact sheets for food service establishments.

CAUTION - "Green" or "Environmentally Friendly" dish washer additives, which may be advertised as a disinfectant or anti-microbial, are weaker disinfectants and should not be relied on alone to eliminate potential pathogens.

Q10 - Is potentially contaminated water safe for washing clothes?

Yes, unless a "Do Not Use" notification has been issued, it is safe to wash clothes in tap water as long as the clothes are completely dried before being worn.

Q11 - Can I brush my teeth with the water without boiling it?

No! Any water you ingest or place in your mouth should be disinfected by boiling (and then cooled) or come from an alternate source (bottled). Bottled water is excellent for brushing your teeth.

Q12 - Is potentially contaminated water safe for bathing and shaving?

Unless a "Do Not Use" notification has been issued, your water may be used by healthy individuals for showering, bathing, shaving, and washing as long as care is taken not to swallow water and avoid shaving nicks.

To minimize the chance of infections, people with open wounds, cuts, blisters or recent surgical wounds and people who are immune-compromised (**people who have long-term illnesses such as cancer or AIDS**) or suffer from chronic illness should use boiled water (then cooled) or water from an alternate source (bottled). Children and disabled individuals should be supervised to ensure water is not ingested. Sponge bathing is advisable, and bathing time should be minimized to further reduce the potential for ingestion.

Q13 - How should I wash my hands during a boil water notice?

Generally, vigorous hand washing with soap and your tap water is safe for basic personal hygiene. If you are washing your hands to prepare food, you should use boiled (then cooled) water, bottled water, or water from another acceptable source for hand washing.

Q14 - Should I use hand sanitizing lotion or wipes?

Hand sanitizing wipes alone are not enough, especially to clean your hands for making food. Alcohol based sanitizers work against some common germs (like *E. coli*, and *Salmonella*) but may not be effective for cryptosporidium and bacterium spores.

Q15 - Is the water safe to give to my pet?

To be certain, give them water that has been boiled then cooled or water from an acceptable alternate source such as bottled water. Many pets regularly drink some pretty bad water, but pets come in a wide variety with variable resistances to pathogens. Many pets are vulnerable to the same diseases that humans can get from contaminated water and can spread these diseases into the environment or pass them on to their owners. More specific information may be available from your veterinarian, based on the actual animal and conditions for the boil water notice.

Q16 - Does a boil water notice affect how I can use my toilets?

There is no need to disinfect water used for flushing.

Q17 - What if I have already consumed potentially contaminated water?

The likelihood of becoming ill is low. However, illness is certainly possible, especially for people that have a chronic illness or may be immune-compromised. This is why boil water notices are issued.

Anyone experiencing symptoms of gastroenteritis, such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, with or without fever, should seek medical attention. These symptoms are not unique to exposure to potential contaminants/organisms in the water, and a doctor's involvement is key to identifying the cause of your illness. If your doctor suspects a waterborne illness, you may be asked to provide blood and/or stool samples.