

Boil Water Advisory

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why do I have to boil my water?

A "Boil Water Advisory" is a notification issued by your public utility as a preventative measure. Boil water advisories are distributed if there is actual or the strong possibility of bacterial contamination in the drinking water system that could make you sick.

2. Should I use bottled water?

Water from an 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.

3. What is the proper way to disinfect my water so it is safe to drink or prepare other drinks like baby bottles, kool-aid, sun tea, ice tea, frozen juices etc.?

The best method of treatment is boiling. Boiling water kills harmful bacteria and parasites (freezing will not disinfect water). Bring water to a full rolling boil for at least 1 minute to kill most infectious organisms (germs). For areas without power, 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

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

Yes, if you thoroughly rinse handwashed 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. It is safe to wash clothes in tap water.

8. Is potentially contaminated water safe for bathing and shaving?

The water may be used for showering, baths, shaving and washing, if absolutely necessary, 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.

9. 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 to wash surfaces where food is prepared. Ice should be made with boiled water, bottled water or disinfected water.

10. What do I do with food and drink prepared during the advisory?

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

11. How does a boil water advisory affect feeding my infant?

Mothers who are breastfeeding should continue to breastfeed their babies. 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.

12. 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. If your doctor determines that your drinking water is making you sick, your case should be referred to the Washington State Dept. of Health or Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department.

13. What infectious organisms might be present in contaminated water?

Illnesses from contaminated water occur principally by ingesting water. The major organisms that produce illnesses are protozoa such as Giardia and Cryptosporidium, and bacteria, such as Shigella, E. coli, and viruses. These organisms primarily affect the gastrointestinal system, causing diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting with or without fever. Most of these illnesses are not usually serious or life threatening except in the elderly, the very young or those with compromised immune systems.

14. Is potentially contaminated water safe for household pets?

The same precautions that are taken to protect humans should be applied to household pets. Fish and other animals living in water should not be exposed to potentially contaminated water. If the animal's water needs to be changed use boiled or bottled water.

15. Where can I get additional information?

www.cdc.gov

Personal Water Use

Hygiene and Sanitation

A Guide to Water Filters