

Q&As About Boil Water Advisories

Why do I have to boil my water?

It is a precautionary measure to destroy bacteria. Contamination may be due to equipment failure, leaking pipes in the system, or insufficient disinfectant in the water supply. The Boil Water Advisory gives you information so you can take action to protect your health.

I cannot boil my water. How do I disinfect my water to make it safe to drink?

If tap water is clear:

- Use bleach that does not have an added scent (like lemon).
- Add 1/8 teaspoon (8 drops or about 0.75 milliliters) of household liquid bleach to 1 gallon (16 cups) of water.
- Mix well and wait 30 minutes or more before drinking.
- Store disinfected water in a clean contain with a cover.

If tap water is cloudy:

- Filter through a clean cloth
- Use bleach that does not have an added scent (like lemon).
- Add 1/4 teaspoon (16 drops or 1.5 milliliters) of household liquid bleach to 1 gallon (16 cups) of water.
- Mix well and wait 30 minutes or more before drinking.
- Store disinfected water in a clean container with a cover.

Remember that containers may need to be sanitized before using them to store safe water:

- Use bleach that does not have an added scent (like lemon).
- Add 1 teaspoon (64 drops or 5 milliliters) of household liquid bleach to 1 quart (32 ounces, 4 cups, or about 1 liter) of water.
- Pour this into a clean storage container and shake well, making sure that the solution coats the entire inside of the container.
- Let sit at least 30 seconds, and then pour out solution.
- Let air dry OR rinse with clean water that has already been made safe, if available.

Never mix bleach with ammonia or other cleaners. Open windows and doors to get fresh air when you use bleach.



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Should I use bottled water?

You may choose to use bottled water if it is available.

I don't like the taste of boiled water. What can I do?

To improve the taste you can:

- Pour cooled water back and forth from one clean glass into another to add air to the water.
- Let the water stand for a few hours.
- Add a pinch of salt to each quart of boiled water.

Food and Beverages

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

Do not use water from any appliance connected to your water lines. This includes water and ice dispensers in your refrigerator/freezer.

- Use boiled or bottled water to make coffee and ice.
- Filters do not remove or kill bacteria or viruses.
- When the boil water advisory is lifted, consult the owner's manual and sanitize appliances.

What about ice?

- Do not use ice from ice trays, ice dispensers, or ice makers.
- Throw out all ice made with tap water.
- Make new ice with boiled or bottled water.

What should I do about preparing food and beverages? How should I wash fruit, vegetables, and food preparation surfaces?

- Wash fruits and vegetables with cooled, boiled water or bottled water.
- Bring water to a rolling boil for one minute before adding food to cook.
- Use boiled water when preparing drinks, such as coffee, tea, and lemonade.
- Wash food preparation surfaces with boiled water.



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What should I do about feeding my baby?

Breastfeeding is best. Continue to breastfeed. If breastfeeding is not an option:

- Use ready-to-use formula, if possible.
- Prepare powdered or concentrated formula with bottled water. Use boiled water if you do not have bottled water. Disinfect water for formula if you cannot boil your water (see above for directions on how to use bleach to disinfect water).
- Wash and sterilize bottles and nipples before use.
- If you cannot sterilize bottles, try to use single-serve, ready-to-feed bottles.

How do I wash dishes during a Boil Water Advisory?

Dishwashers are safe to use if the water reaches a temperature of at least 160°F or if the dishwasher has a sanitizing cycle.

To wash dishes by hand:

- Wash and rinse the dishes as normal using hot water.
- In a separate basin, add 1 teaspoon of unscented household bleach for each gallon of warm water.
- Soak the rinsed dishes in the water for at least 1 minute.
- Let the dishes air dry completely.

Health

I already drank the water. Will I get sick?

Most people who drink this water will not get sick. If you do get sick, the symptoms are similar to food poisoning: nausea, diarrhea, cramps, and possibly a mild fever.

What should I do if I have symptoms?

The most important thing to do is avoid dehydration. Drink plenty of fluids and avoid drinks with caffeine, such as soda, coffee, and tea. If you are concerned about your health or the health of a family member, contact your health care provider.



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Household Information

Should I give my pets boiled water?

Pets can get some of the same diseases as people. It is a good idea to give them boiled water that has been cooled.

Do I need to worry about my fish or aquatic pets (e.g., reptiles, frogs)?

Most germs that infect people do not infect reptiles or fish. If your water system is using more chlorine or changing disinfection, be cautious about changing the water in your fish tank or aquarium. Contact your local pet store or veterinarian for more advice.

Is it safe to water my garden and house plants?

You can use tap water for household plants and gardens.

What [microbe, organisms, germs, bacteria] might be in the water?

Many types of microbes could be in the water. Water systems are concerned about bacteria (*E. coli*), viruses (norovirus), and parasites (*Cryptosporidium*).

Human illness from these microbes is usually caused by eating raw or undercooked food, recreational or other untreated water, or poor hand-washing. Diarrheal illness from these microbes is not usually life threatening, except in the elderly, the very young, or those with weak immune systems. If you are concerned, consult your health care provider or contact.

Hygiene

Can I use tap water to brush my teeth?

No. Do not use tap water to brush your teeth. Use boiled or bottled water.

Is it safe to take a shower or bath?

Yes, it is safe to take a bath or shower, but be careful not to swallow any water. Use caution when bathing infants and young children. Consider giving them a sponge bath to reduce the chance of them swallowing water.

What about shaving?

Yes, you can shave as usual.



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What about doing laundry?

Yes, it is safe to do laundry as usual.

Where can I get more information?

- [Personal Water Use](#): CDC provides guidance on the amount of water needed for good health, as well as its preparation and storage in preparation for and during an emergency.
- [Hygiene and Sanitation](#): CDC provides guidance on alternative hygienic practices when water is not available or is contaminated.
- [A Guide to Water Filters](#): CDC maintains a guide for filters that remove *Cryptosporidium* or *Giardia*.
- Safe Drinking Water Hotline: 1-800-426-4791

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