Comprehensive List of Q&As for Boil Water Advisories

PURPOSE

This list includes questions most often asked during boil water advisories. This information was developed from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), water system, and primacy agency materials. The content was adapted to help water systems provide customers with clear and concise information and actions to take.

Water systems are encouraged to use this information as a guide to help create their own fact sheets and other communication materials. Recommendations may vary depending on the circumstances and severity of water contamination. Select specific questions that are appropriate for each advisory situation.

This information is for Tier 1 Public Notices. For a waterborne disease outbreak, consult with local and state public health authorities to adapt the information.

DIRECTIONS

- *Brackets [ ] indicate places to insert specific information, such as the water system name, health department information, or the contaminant.*

- *Limit fact sheets for customers to one page front and back.*

- *Refer to the fact sheets from the "Tools and Templates" in Section 1 and Section 2 of this toolbox for additional topics.*

Use the Q&As to develop scripts or fact sheets for water system staff, especially customer service and field crews. Uses include

- Briefing materials for public health departments and other partners.

- Media kits and updates.

- Customer fact sheets.

- Websites and widgets.

Boiling Water

How do I boil my water during an advisory?

- Fill a pot with water.

- Heat the water until bubbles come from the bottom of the pot to the top.

- Once the water reaches a rolling boil, let it boil for 1 minute.

- Turn off the heat source and let the water cool.

- Pour water into a clean container with a cover for storage.

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Why do I have to boil my water?

Your water [may be, is] contaminated by [bacteria, virus, protozoa, parasite]. Contamination [may be, is] due to [equipment failure, leaking/broken pipes in the system, 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?

(Caution: Water contaminated with fuel or a toxic chemical will not be made safe by boiling or disinfection. Use another source of water if you know or suspect that water might be contaminated with fuel or a toxic chemical.)

If tap water is clear:

- Use unscented bleach (bleach that does not have an added scent).
- Add 1/8 teaspoon (8 drops or about 0.75 milliliters) of unscented 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 unscented bleach (bleach that does not have an added scent).
- Add 1/4 teaspoon (16 drops or 1.5 milliliters) of unscented 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.

To sanitize containers:

- Use unscented bleach (bleach that does not have an added scent).
- Make a sanitizing solution by mixing 1 teaspoon (5 milliliters) of unscented household liquid bleach in 1 quart (32 ounces, 4 cups, or about 1 liter) of water.
- Pour this sanitizing solution into a clean storage container and shake well, making sure that the solution coats the entire inside of the container.
- Let the clean storage container sit at least 30 seconds, and then pour the solution out of the container.
- Let the empty container air dry OR rinse it 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.

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 of boiled water you can:

- Pour cooled boiled water back and forth from one clean glass or container into another to add air to the water, or
- Let the water stand for a few hours, or
- 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 the water and ice dispensers in your refrigerator/freezer. Most kitchen and other household water filters typically do not remove or kill all bacteria or viruses.

- Use boiled or bottled water to make coffee and ice.
- Most kitchen and other household water filters typically do not remove or kill all bacteria or viruses.
- When the boil water advisory is lifted, consult the owner's manual to find out how to sanitize appliances.

Can I use ice from my refrigerator/freezer?

- 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 boiled water that has cooled or bottled water.
- Bring water to a rolling boil for 1 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.

Comprehensive List of Q&As for Boil Water Advisories, continued

What should I do about feeding my baby?

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

- Use ready-to-use baby formula, if possible.

- Prepare powdered or concentrated baby formula with bottled water. Use boiled water if you do not have bottled water. Disinfect water for baby 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?

Household dishwashers generally are safe to use if the water reaches a final rinse temperature of at least 150°F or if the dishwasher has a sanitizing cycle.

To wash dishes by hand:

- Wash and rinse the dishes as you normally would, using hot water.

- In a separate basin, add 1 teaspoon of unscented household liquid 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 happen to 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 or [local health department].

Comprehensive Listof Q&As for Boil Water Advisories, continued

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 such as *E. coli*, viruses such as norovirus, and parasites such as *Cryptosporidium*.

Human illness from these microbes is usually caused by eating raw or undercooked food, ingesting contaminated 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 [local health department].

Hygiene

Can I use tap water to brush my teeth?

No. Do not use untreated 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 babies 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 Preparation and Storage of Safe Water**: CDC provides guidance on the amount of water needed for good health, as well as how to prepare and store safe water before and during an emergency.

- **Hygiene and Handwashing**: 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*.

- EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline: 1-800-426-4791

  » **Consumer Information** : EPA provides information and guidance about drinking water quality, emergencies, contaminants, public health issues, and treatment and storage.

- Water system: [name, title, phone, e-mail, website]

- State or local public health department: [name, title, phone, e-mail, website]

- Primacy Agency: [name, title, phone, e-mail, website]