

Using Water Safely in Food Establishments During a Boil Water Advisory

What is a boil water advisory?

A boil water advisory is issued when harmful germs (e.g., *E.coli* bacteria, *Giardia* parasite) may be in a drinking water supply. Drinking water contaminated with these germs can make people and animals very sick. Boiling will kill the germs and make the water safe to drink after cooling.

Food service establishments are allowed to operate during the boil water advisory as long as the conditions outlined below are strictly followed.

What immediate steps must a food establishment take when a boil water advisory is issued?

- **DO NOT** use the water for drinking, making juices and ice, washing fruits and vegetables and for preparing ready-to-eat foods.
- Turn off drinking water fountains.
- Disconnect vegetable spraying sprinkler systems. Use treated or bottled water in spray bottles to keep your vegetables moist.
- Throw away ice and beverages that may have already been prepared with the affected water supply.
- Discontinue making ice; use ice from a commercial ice supplier made with safe water.
- Disconnect ice cream machines, dipper-wells and any other food preparation equipment connected to the water supply.
- Post signs at all faucets, including the kitchen area and washrooms as a reminder of the boil water advisory and not to drink the water.

To make the water safe, **bring to a rapid rolling boil for at least one minute**. Boil only as much water in the pot that one can comfortably lift without spilling. Ensure water is cooled appropriately before using or before direct handling to prevent scalds. Provide only water safe for drinking to customers.

What sources of water are approved to be used in a restaurant during a boil water advisory?

- Water that has been boiled for one full minute (Water can be boiled the night before, cooled overnight and stored in a covered disinfected container. Always ensure water is cooled appropriately before use or direct handling to prevent scalds.)
- Commercially bottled water
- Hauled water from an alternate approved supply not affected by the boil water advisory

Can the cold beverage dispensing machine be used?

No. Beverage machines connected to the cold water supply used to dispense cold drinks (slush, carbonated beverages, iced cappuccino, etc.) must not be used during the boil water advisory.

Can tap water be used to prepare food products that use water as an ingredient without cooking?

No. Use boiled, bottled or an alternate safe water source in the preparation of food products such as powdered drinks, puddings, jellies, sauces, etc.

Can tap water be used to prepare food that will be boiled?

Yes. Tap water can be used to prepare food that will be boiled as long as the water is brought to a rolling boil for one minute. Ensure water is cooled appropriately before use or before direct handling to prevent scalds.

Can commercial coffee brewers and hot tea towers be used during a boil water advisory?

Yes. Ensure the coffee maker and hot tea towers produce water at **70°C/160°F**. This temperature is sufficient to inactivate disease-causing microorganisms. It is recommended that the coffee pot be held for at least **five minutes** on the burner before consumption. The temperature should be verified using a probe thermometer.

Can tap water be used for handwashing?

Yes. Wash hands using tap water and soap, making sure to lather and scrub all surfaces of the hand for a minimum of 20 seconds. Rinse hands well with running water, and dry with a paper towel. After washing hands with tap water, **use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer** containing more than 60% alcohol. Ensure that hand sanitizer is provided at each handwashing station including public washrooms. Good handwashing practices should be emphasized to all staff.

Can the commercial dishwasher be used to clean and sanitize dishes?

Yes. Follow the normal dishwashing procedure, and ensure that the dishes have enough time for complete air drying to take place.

Can the glass washer with a cold water rinse be used?

No. Glass washers with a cold water rinse must not be used during the boil water advisory. It is recommended the commercial dishwasher or manual 3-compartment sink procedure to wash and sanitize the glasses. For further information, discuss with the local Environmental Health Officer. Single-use glasses/cups can also be used.

Can tap water be used to wash dishes by hand?

Yes. Follow the normal 3-compartment sink dishwashing procedure, and ensure that the dishes have enough time for complete air drying to take place.

Can tap water be used for general cleaning purposes?

Yes. Tap water can be used for general cleaning of surfaces and to prepare sanitizing solutions. Cleaned surfaces and equipment should be sanitized with one of the approved sanitizers listed below, and allowed to air dry. Sanitizer concentration should be tested regularly with sanitizer test papers or other testing equipment, unless the sanitizer is premixed by the manufacturer and marked with an expiry date.

Approved Sanitizers:

- Chlorine solution: 100 ppm chlorine (1/2 teaspoon household bleach per litre of water).
- Quaternary Ammonia Solution: Generally 200 ppm. Follow manufacturer's instructions for correct dilution, contact time, and if rinsing is required prior to food contact. The product must have a DIN issued by Health Canada.
- Iodine Solution: 12.5-25 ppm iodine. Follow manufacturer's directions.
- Accelerated Hydrogen Peroxide: 0.5% AHP. Follow manufacturer's instructions for correct dilution, contact time and if rinsing is required prior to food contact. The product must have a DIN issued by Health Canada.

Should customers be notified?

Yes. All washrooms must be posted with appropriate boil water signage. If customers ask about procedures, you can provide them with this information sheet which indicates how you are modifying food handling practices to protect them from potential contaminants.

PROCEDURES TO TAKE AFTER A BOIL WATER ADVISORY IS ENDED

- Flush all water-using fixtures by running the tap for five minutes. If your service connection is long or complex, consider flushing for a longer period of time.
- Ensure equipment with water line connections such as post-mix beverage machines, auto-fill coffee/tea makers, instant hot water heaters, ice machines, vegetable spray lines/misters etc. are flushed, cleaned and disinfected according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Flush, drain, clean and disinfect cisterns that contained the affected water source.
- Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Drain and refill hot water heaters that have been set below 45°C/110°F.

For more information about using water during a boil water advisory, contact the local Environmental Health Officer.

Environmental Public Health Services
First Nations and Inuit Health Branch, Alberta Region
Edmonton Phone: (780) 495-2712
Calgary Phone: (403) 299-3939