Using Water Safely at Home 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.

When a boil water advisory has been issued, how should the water be used?

When a boil water advisory has been issued, **do not** use the tap water to:

- drink
- prepare baby formula
- make juice
- make ice
- prepare foods
- wash fruits or vegetables
- brush teeth
- fill a wading pool
- give to pets

During a boil water advisory use boiled water, bottled water or water from another safe public supply not affected by the advisory. Throw away any ice in your freezer made with the water and sanitize the ice cube trays.

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. An electric kettle with auto-shut off feature is effective. Ensure water is cooled appropriately before using or before direct handling to prevent scalds.

What special precautions should people with a weakened immune system take?

Individuals with weakened immune systems, should consult with a doctor.

Is bottled water or water from self-serve water dispensers safe to use?

Sometimes you can use bottled water, but it depends on when and how the water was bottled. Bottling plants and/or water dispensers that use local water must treat the water to remove harmful germs. Check with the Environmental Public Health Office (phone numbers below) about bottled water brands or water dispensers that have been treated so the water is safe. You can also use water bottled from another public water supply not affected by the advisory.

Is the water safe to drink if an on-site water filtration device is used?

If you have a water filtration device, **do not** use the water during a boil water advisory. Many filtration devices do not remove harmful germs. Check with the manufacturer to find out what the filtration device does remove.

GENERAL HYGIENE DURING A BOIL WATER ADVISORY

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.

Can tap water be used for showering or bathing?
Healthy individuals may take showers or baths with untreated tap water, if they are careful not to swallow any tap water. Younger children (elementary school age) should not use the water for showering unless properly instructed and supervised. Infants, toddlers and young children are more likely to drink bath water, so they should be given a sponge bath instead of bathing them in a tub. People with open wounds, cuts, blisters or recent surgical wounds should not use the water for showering, unless measures are in place to prevent exposure to wound areas (such as covering the wound with a waterproof covering).

Can tap water be used for brushing teeth?
No. During a boil water advisory, **do not** use tap water to brush teeth. Use boiled water that is cooled, bottled water or water from another safe source.

Can tap water be used for washing laundry?
Yes. During a boil water advisory, continue washing laundry like normal. Ensure that a mechanical dryer (hot drying method) is used to completely dry the material.

Can tap water be used for general cleaning purposes?
Yes. Tap water can be used for general cleaning of surfaces and to prepare a bleach sanitizing solution (1/2 teaspoon household bleach per litre of water). Spray or wipe cleaned surfaces with the bleach solution and allow to air dry. A new bleach solution should be made daily.

PREPARING FOOD DURING A BOIL WATER ADVISORY

Can tap water be used to make coffee?
During a boil water advisory, the coffeemaker may be used if it heats water to **70°C** or hotter. Test the coffee temperature with a probe thermometer. Let the coffee sit in the pot for at least five minutes before drinking. If the coffee maker does not heat the water to at least 70°C, and does not incorporate a burner for 5-minute hold time, use bottled or boiled water to make coffee.

Can tap water be used to wash dishes by hand?
Yes. Wash and rinse dishes with hot tap water, and then sanitize the dishes to reduce the amount of germs to a safe level. Soak the dishes for at least two minutes in a bleach solution of 1 tablespoon of household bleach in 4 litres (20 cups) of warm water. Let the dishes air-dry completely.

Can domestic dishwashers be used?
A domestic dishwasher can be used if it works well and has a hot temperature setting or sanitizer cycle. Let the dishes dry completely, preferably using a heated dry cycle on the dishwasher. If the dishwasher does not have a hot temperature setting, it is recommended that dishes be sanitized using method outlined in the hand dishwashing question above.

How should counter tops, cutting boards or other kitchen surfaces be sanitized?
Tap water can be used for cleaning of kitchen surfaces and equipment, and to prepare a bleach sanitizing solution (1/2 teaspoon household bleach per litre of water). Spray or wipe cleaned surfaces or equipment with the bleach solution and allow to air dry. A new bleach solution should be made daily.

PROCEDURES TO TAKE AFTER A BOIL WATER ADVISORY IS ENDED

- Flush all water-using fixtures by running the tap for five minutes.
- Ensure equipment with water line connections such as refrigerator water and ice dispensers are drained, 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 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
Regional Delivery Sector, Alberta Region
Edmonton Phone: (780) 495-2712
Calgary Phone: (403) 299-3939