

A “boil-water advisory” or “boil-water order” is a public health advisory or directive given by government or health authorities to consumers when a community's drinking water is, or could be, contaminated by bacteria, viruses or other pathogens.

Under a boil-water advisory (BWA), the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that water be brought to a rolling boil for one minute before it is consumed in order to kill protozoa, bacteria and viruses.

One reason for a BWA is a failure of distribution system integrity evidenced by a loss of system pressure, or shut down of water main valves. While loss of pressure does not necessarily mean the water has been contaminated, it does mean that pathogens may be able to enter the piped-water system and thus be carried to consumers

What to do During an Boil Water Advisory

Boiling water

To boil water

- Fill a pot with water.
- Heat the water until bubbles come from the bottom of the pot.
- Once the water reaches a rolling boil, let it boil for 1 minute.
- Turn off the heat source and let the water cool.
- Pour the water into a clean container with a cover for storage.

Disinfecting water

If you are unable to boil your water, disinfect it instead.

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 clean container with a cover.

If tap water is cloudy:

- Filter water using 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 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.

Water Filters

Boil tap water even if it is filtered. Water filters do not remove bacteria, protozoans or viruses.

Household Water Usage

Preparing and cooking food

- Use boiled water to wash all fruits and vegetables.
- Bring water to a rolling boil for 1 minute before adding food.
- Use boiled water when preparing drinks, such as coffee, tea, and lemonade

Feeding infants and using formula

- 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.

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.

Bathing and showering

- Be careful not to swallow any water when bathing or showering.
- Use caution when bathing infants and young children. Consider giving them a sponge bath to reduce the chance of them swallowing water.

Brushing teeth

Brush teeth with boiled or bottled water.

Washing dishes

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 you normally would 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 one minute.
- Let the dishes air dry completely.

Laundry

It is safe to do laundry using regular methods, though it is recommended to NOT wash “whites” as water can be ‘stained’ or ‘dirty’ appearing following water main breaks.

Pets

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