

Boil-Water Notice FAQs

Should I boil my water?

Yes, boiling water kills harmful bacteria and parasites. Bringing water to a rolling boil for **THREE** minutes will kill most organisms. Water may be treated with chlorine or iodine tablets or by mixing eight drops (1/8 teaspoon) of unscented, ordinary household chlorine bleach (5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite) per gallon of water. Mix the solution thoroughly, and let stand for about 30 minutes. However, this treatment will not kill parasitic organisms.

What organisms can be in contaminated water?

Bringing water to a rolling boil for **THREE** minutes will kill most organisms. Disease transmission from contaminated water occurs typically through ingestion. The major organisms of concern are bacteria such as *E. coli* and *Shigella*. These organisms primarily affect the gastrointestinal system and cause diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea and vomiting (with or without a fever). These illnesses can seriously affect the health of the elderly, very young or those who are immunocompromised.

Is bottled water safe to use?

If you use bottled water, know where it came from. Otherwise, water should be boiled or treated before use. Drink only bottled, boiled or treated water until your supply is tested and found safe.

Can I wash my dishes?

Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food or make ice. Make sure to boil your water for **THREE** minutes or treat water before use. Drink only bottled, boiled or treated water until your water supply system is tested and found to be safe.

Should I wash fruits and vegetables with water?

Fruits and vegetables should be washed with boiled (then cooled) water, bottled water or water sanitized with eight drops (1/8 teaspoon) of unscented, household chlorine bleach per gallon of water.

Can I use my ice?

Only if it was made before the boil water notice was issued. All other ice should be discarded. Ice can be made with boiled, bottled or sanitized water.

What if my water system loses pressure?

If water systems lose pressure, the local water system may issue a boil water notice. However, if your home has lost electrical power or you have noticed a drop in water pressure, you should boil your drinking water until you have been notified your water is safe. Bringing water to a rolling boil for **THREE** minutes will kill most organisms.

I get my water from a well. How do I disinfect my well?

Private wells should not be affected by the boil water notice. If you choose to disinfect your home well, it is important to disinfect both the well and plumbing with chlorine bleach to ensure that all infectious agents are killed. If you have water treatment devices, remove all membranes, cartridges and filters and replace them with new membranes, cartridges or filters after the chlorination process is completed. The amount of chlorine and the length of time you allow it to remain in your system are equally important.

- Common unscented laundry bleach can be used effectively as a chlorine disinfectant. **(continued)**

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Should I get my water tested?

No, because a water test will only tell you what is in your water at that time. It won't help to tell you what else is in the distribution system. Therefore, the water testing needs to be conducted on the entire system, as it has been by the local water authority.

What can I expect to happen to me if I drink this water?

Strong, healthy individuals may not have any symptoms at all, but those who are immune compromised may suffer symptoms common with short-term illness, such as diarrhea, cramps, nausea, headaches, mild fever or others (and can face greater risks as a result). Contact your medical provider if an infant shows any of these signs, or if you are elderly or your immune system is weak and you experience any of these symptoms.

What if I washed in or drank water already?

There is nothing that you can do about the exposure you have already received. If you develop any symptoms, you may want to contact your physician. Make sure you use only pre-boiled or bottled water for any cooking or food preparation, drinking or bathing of infants between now and when you are told the water is safe.

How long is this problem going to last?

The boil water notice will be lifted as soon as local officials receive good samples from laboratory analysis confirming it is safe. Typically, it takes 48 to 72 hours to determine whether water is safe to drink through a contaminated water supply system.

Can I wash my clothes?

Yes, however you may want to wait if the water is visibly discolored.

Can I shower, shave, or take a bath?

Yes, provided you don't swallow the water. Young children should not be bathed in this water. The danger in bathing infants and young children in this water is that they often swallow some accidentally. To prevent this, bathe your children with pre-boiled or bottled water or give them sponge baths using only a small amount of water. There is no problem with bathing nursing home or elderly patients unless there is any possibility of them swallowing the water. Patients with open sores or those with recent surgical wounds, who have a chronic illness or are immunosuppressed (immune compromised), should consider using bottled or boiled water for bathing until the boil water notice is lifted.

Should I bathe in my pool?

No, don't use swimming pools as a substitute for bathing. The tap is safer. In any case, make sure that your pool is properly chlorinated and you have a test kit to determine the amount of chlorine.

Is it safe to use the water when cooking?

No, Use pre-boiled water for all preparation of food. If food is to be cooked in water, bring water to a rolling boil for **THREE** minutes.

Filters are unacceptable for removing bacteria.

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Ice machines, vending machines, or soda dispensers that are directly connected to the water supply cannot be used.

Coffee machines directly connected to the water supply cannot be used unless they are able to heat water to boiling and hold it at a rolling boil for at least **THREE** minutes before making the coffee. Bottled or previously boiled water may also be used.

Can I water the grass or garden?

Yes, but wash fruits and vegetables in pre-boiled or bottled water before eating them.

What about my pets?

Pets are not affected by the same diseases as humans and therefore providing them tap water to drink and bathing them in tap water will not be a problem. If you are still concerned, however, give them bottled or pre-boiled water (allow it to cool).

For questions please contact the Division of Environmental Health and Protection at (636) 949-1800.