

## **Boil Water Order - FAQ**

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### **Why must I boil my water?**

A boil order has been issued to your water system because either recent testing has shown the presence of organisms that could cause illness (e.g. fecal or E. coli bacteria), or technical/physical problems in the water system have significantly increased the possibility of bacterial contamination.

### **How can I make my water safe?**

Boiling the water is the best way to ensure that it is free of illness-causing organisms. Bring water to a rolling boil for a minimum of one minute. When it cools, refrigerate the water in clean containers. (A pinch of salt per quart may improve the rather flat taste of boiled water). If you do not want to boil your water, you can disinfect it by adding 1/8 teaspoon of bleach (common household bleach containing 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite) per gallon of water. Do not use bleach containing perfume, dyes, or other additives.

### **Is it necessary to boil all water in the home during an advisory or order?**

During boil water advisories or boil water orders, you should boil all water used for drinking, preparing food, beverages, ice cubes, washing fruits and vegetables, or brushing teeth. Severely immuno-compromised individuals should always boil their tap water for the purposes noted above. Infant formulas should be prepared using boiled tap water, at all times. In the event that boiling is not practical, the PWS may recommend an alternative supply known to be safe (e.g., bottled water) or may direct you to disinfect the water using household bleach.

It is not necessary to boil tap water used for other household purposes, such as showering, laundry, or bathing. Adults, teens, and older children can wash, bathe, or shower; however, they should avoid swallowing the water. Toddlers and infants should be sponge-bathed.

### **How should tap water be boiled properly?**

Water should be placed in a heat-resistant container or in an electric kettle without an automatic shut-off and brought to a rolling boil for 1 minute to kill all disease-causing organisms.

Water can also be boiled in a microwave oven using a microwave-safe container, but it is advisable to include a glass rod or wooden or plastic stir stick in the container to prevent the formation of superheated water (water heated above its boiling point, without the formation of steam). The water should then be cooled and poured into a clean container or refrigerated until you are ready to use it.

At elevations over 6,500 feet (2,000 meters) water boils at a slightly lower temperature and should therefore be boiled for at least two minutes to kill all disease-causing organisms.

### **I have a water treatment device; do I still need to boil my drinking water?**

If the device is designed to improve the taste and odor or chemical quality of the water, such as activated carbon filters, it is still necessary to boil the water. Check with the manufacturer if you are not certain.

### **Can I use bottled water?**

Buying bottled water may be a feasible alternative to boiling water. Bottled water operations are routinely inspected, and samples are periodically analyzed to ensure they meet health standards.

### What can I do with my tap water?

Drinking	No
Ice Cubes	No, and existing ice cubes should be thrown out. See below for information on ice machines.
Brushing Teeth	No
Baby's Formula	No
Washing Fruit/Vegetables	No
Preparing Food	No
Coffee, Tea, Lemonade, etc.	No. See below for information on soda dispensers and coffee makers.
Laundry	Yes
Watering Grass or Garden	Yes, but fruits/vegetables must be washed using boiled or bottled water before consumption.
Washing Hands	See below
Showers or Baths	See below
Washing Dishes	See below

**During a boil order, can I wash my hands using tap water?**

It is recommended that you wash your hands using soap and either bottled water or boiled water. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer may also be used.

**During a boil order, can my family take showers or baths using tap water?**

The risk of bathing in tap water is uncertain and so should be avoided particularly by people with open wounds or who are immuno-compromised. For those people who choose to shower or bathe in the tap water, minimize the time spent in the water and be sure to keep your eyes and mouth closed. Babies and young children should not bathe or shower in tap water because they often swallow some water accidentally.

**During a boil order, can I wash dishes using tap water?**

You may use a dishwasher if it has a sanitizing cycle. If it does not have a sanitizing cycle, or you are not sure if it does, you may hand wash dishes and utensils by following these steps:

1. Wash the dishes as you normally would.
2. As a final step, immerse the dishes for at least one minute in lukewarm water to which a teaspoon of bleach per gallon of water has been added.
3. Allow the dishes to completely air dry.

**Can I use my coffee maker, ice machine, water or soda dispenser?**

None of these devices should be used if they are directly connected to your water supply. Also, filters are unacceptable for removing bacteria. Once you have been notified that the boil order has been lifted, these devices should be cleaned and sanitized according to the operator's manual for the device.

**Can I give my pets tap water?**

Although pets are not normally affected by the same diseases as humans, caution suggests giving pets boiled or bottled water.

**What are the symptoms of water-borne illness?**

Disease symptoms may include diarrhea, cramps, nausea and possible jaundice and associated headaches and fatigue. Symptoms may appear as early as a few hours to several days after infection and may last more than two weeks. These symptoms, however, are not just associated with disease-causing organisms in drinking water; they may also be caused by a number of other factors. If you are ill with these symptoms, contact your health care provider.

**What if I drank the water already?**

There is nothing you can do about the exposure you have already received. If you become ill, contact your health care provider. Follow the above recommendations about using your water until you are told the water is safe again.

**How long will the boil order remain in effect?**

Each boil order situation is different, making it impossible to predict how long the boil order will remain in effect. It will not be lifted until testing shows that the water meets public health standards. Boil water advisories or boil water orders are lifted when the water is considered safe and no longer poses a threat to public health.

**What should I do when the boil water advisory or order has been lifted?**

The public water system may provide specific instructions. Consumers should flush water pipes within the home. When flushing it is important to carefully follow the instructions provided. Some types of water treatment devices may need to be disinfected and flushed to remove any contaminated water before being used. Depending on the type of water treatment device, the device may need to be replaced. Check with the manufacturer for details.

**A note about *E. coli* bacteria:**

*E. coli* is a sub-group of the fecal coliform bacteria group. There are many strains of *E. coli*, most of which are harmless, but some strains can cause illness. *E. coli* outbreaks receive much media coverage. Most outbreaks have been related to food contamination (not water) caused by a specific strain of *E. coli* known as *E. coli* O157:H7. When a drinking water sample is reported as "E. coli positive", it does not mean that this specific strain is present and in fact, it is probably not present. However, it does indicate recent fecal contamination. Boiling or treating contaminated drinking water with a disinfectant destroys all forms of *E. coli*, including O157:H7.