

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING BOIL WATER NOTICES

A Boil Water Notice may be issued by your water utility or the Health Department to address potential contamination problems associated with drinking water treatment and delivery. Common reasons for a Boil Water Notice are loss of pressure in the distribution system and unexpected water quality problems. Often these causes are the result of other events; power outages, water line breaks, and floods or other forms of severe weather.

Questions often arise about using water during a boil water event. Below are answers to questions that are commonly asked:

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from Homeowners and Residents

1. Does a Boil Water Notice affect how I can use my toilets?

There is no need to disinfect water used for flushing. Unless there has also been a water conservation advisory issued, there is no concern about using your toilet during a boil water event.

2. Is potentially contaminated water safe for washing dishes or clothes?

Hand-washed dishes: Yes, if rinsed for a minute in dilute bleach (1 tablespoon per gallon of water). Allow dishes to completely air dry.

Home dishwasher: Yes, if the hot wash is at least 170 degrees F and includes the dry cycle. Again, allow dishes to completely dry.

Commercial dishwasher: Yes, if an NSF listed washer and manufactured with either a hot wash (170°F) or a disinfectant rinse.

It is safe to wash clothes in tap water.

3. Is potentially contaminated water safe for bathing and shaving?

The water may be used for showering, baths, shaving and washing, so long as care is taken not to swallow water. Children and disabled individuals should have their bathing supervised to ensure water is not ingested. Though the risk of illness is minimal, individuals who have recent surgical wounds are immunosuppressed, or suffering from chronic illness may want to consider using bottled or boiled (then cooled) water for cleansing until the boil water notice is lifted.

4. How should I wash my hands during a Boil Water Notice?

Based on the current conditions of the affected public water supplies, vigorous hand washing with soap and your tap water is safe for basic personal hygiene.

5. What if I have already consumed potentially contaminated water?

Even if someone has consumed potentially contaminated water from either a public water system or a private well before they were aware of the boil water notice, the likelihood of becoming ill is very low. Anyone experiencing symptoms of gastroenteritis, such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, with or without fever, should seek medical attention.

6. What is the proper way to disinfect my water so that it is safe to drink?

There are several disinfection methods that homeowners can use:

Boil – The preferred method of treatment is boiling. Boiling water kills harmful bacteria and parasites. Bring water to a full **ROLLING** boil for at least 1 minute to kill infectious organisms, and be sure to allow the water to cool before using.

Chemical – If boiling water is not possible (power outage) potentially contaminated water may be treated with chlorine. Mix six drops (1/8 teaspoon) of unscented, ordinary household bleach (5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite) per gallon of water. Mix the solution thoroughly, let stand for about thirty minutes. To disinfect using iodine put eight drops of 2% tincture of iodine in one quart of water. Allow the water to stand at least 30 minutes before it is used. Chemical disinfection may not be appropriate where there is a chance of sewage contamination, since it would only be marginally effective against *Giardia* and does not protect against *Cryptosporidium* contamination. If there is a possibility of sewage contamination, New York State certified bottled water or water trucked by a New York certified bulk water hauler should be used.

These disinfection methods can impact the normal taste of your water, aerating the disinfected water by pouring it back and forth between two clean containers can help to restore normal taste.

7. What infectious organisms might be present in contaminated water?

Disease transmission from contaminated water occurs principally by ingesting water. The major organisms of concern are protozoa such as *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium*, and bacteria, such as *Shigella*, *E. coli* and viruses. These organisms primarily affect the gastrointestinal system, causing diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting with or without fever. (LHD/DO may offer more specific information based on details of the particular situation). Most of these illnesses are not usually serious or life threatening except in the elderly, the very young or those who are immunocompromised.

8. Does my in home refrigerator water provide enough protection that I don't need to boil my water?

No, in-home filters in general cannot guarantee removal of pathogens. Many in-home filters are not effective against pathogens, and some are only effective against certain size pathogens. Only reverse osmosis treatment units should be relied upon for in home pathogen removal. Your safest way to protect you and your family is to disinfect drinking water using a rolling boil for at least one minute.

9. How should I wash fruits and vegetables and make ice?

Fruits and vegetables should be washed and rinsed with boiled (then cooled water) or bottled water. Ice should be made with either boiled or bottled water.

10. What should homeowners do when the Boil Water Notice is lifted?

- Flush household pipes/faucets: follow the directions of your water utility (in the newspaper, radio, or television, or as general guidance, run cold water faucets for 3 minutes each if they have not been used in the last 24 hours.
- Flush home automatic ice makers: make three batches of ice cubes and discard all three batches.
- Drain and refill your hot water heater if set at a low temperature (below 113° F).
- Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from Businesses and Medical Offices:

11. In my Dental practice, does the Boil Water Notice apply to water used for patients?

Yes, it absolutely does apply. Boil Water Notices are usually issued because of the potential for biological contamination. There is potential exposure from the rinse water from accidental ingestion as well as contact with open mouth sores and aggravated gums.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Guidelines for Infection Control in Dental Health-Care Settings"-2003:

Boil-Water Advisories

I. The following apply while a Boil-Water Advisory is in effect:

- a. Do not deliver water from the public water system to the patient through the dental operative unit, ultrasonic scaler, or other dental equipment that uses the public water system.
- b. Do not use water from the public water system for dental treatment, patient rinsing, or hand washing.
- c. For hand washing, use antimicrobial-containing products that do not require water for use (e.g. alcohol-based hand rubs). If hands are visibly contaminated, use bottled water, if available.

II. The following apply when the Boil-Water Advisory is cancelled:

- a. Follow guidance given by local water utility regarding flushing of water lines. If no guidance is provided, flush dental waterlines and faucets for 1-5 minutes before using for patient care.
- b. Disinfect dental waterlines as recommended by the dental unit manufacturer.