

Boil Water Advisory Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why do I have to boil my water?

A "Boil Water Advisory" has been issued by the City of Flint due to a drop in pressure in the City of Flint water supply. Due to this drop in pressure, bacterial contamination may have occurred in the water system.

Bacteria are not generally harmful and are common throughout our environment. Corrective measures are currently underway to remedy the situation.

2. Should I use bottled water?

Water from an alternative water source is the best option during a "Boil Water Advisory." When bottled water is available, it is a good alternative to boiling water.

3. What is the proper way to disinfect my water so it is safe to drink or prepare other drinks like baby bottles, drink mixes, tea, frozen juices, etc.?

The best method of treatment for those served by the City of Flint Water department is to first filter the water through an NSF-approved water filter. Then, the water must be boiled.

Boiling water kills harmful bacteria and parasites (freezing will not disinfect water). Bring water to a full rolling boil for at least 1 minute to kill most infectious organisms (germs).

For areas without power, disinfect tap water by adding 8 drops, about 1/8 teaspoon, of plain unscented household bleach to a gallon of water. Thoroughly mix the solution and allow the water to stand for 30 minutes.

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

Do not use if they are directly connected to your water supply. Use bottled water or water that has been boiled or disinfected for making coffee and ice.

Once you have been notified that the boil water advisory has been lifted, these devices should be cleaned, disinfected and flushed according to the operator's manual for the device.

5. Can I just use my filter instead of boiling water?

No. You must boil the water after you run it through the filter during the "Boil Water Advisory."

6. Can I use tap water to brush my teeth?

No. Do not use tap water to brush your teeth. Use bottled water or water that has been filtered and boiled or disinfected as you would for drinking.

7. How should I wash my hands during a boil water advisory?

Vigorous handwashing with soap and your tap water is safe for basic personal hygiene. However, if you are washing your hands to prepare food, you should use boiled (then cooled) water, disinfected or bottled water with handwashing soap.

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

Yes, if you thoroughly rinse hand washed dishes for a minute in a bleach solution (1 tablespoon bleach per gallon of filtered water). Allow dishes to completely air dry. Most household dishwashers don't reach the proper temperature to sanitize dishes. It is safe to wash clothes in tap water.

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

The water may be used for showering, baths, shaving and washing, if absolutely necessary, but don't swallow water or allow it to get in your eyes, nose or mouth. Children and disabled individuals should have their bath supervised to make sure water is not ingested. Minimize bathing time. Though the risk of illness is minimal, individuals who have recent surgical wounds, have compromised immune systems, or have a chronic illness may want to consider using bottled or boiled water for cleansing until the advisory is lifted.

10. How should I wash fruit, vegetables, and food preparation surfaces or make ice?

Wash fruit and vegetables with filtered and boiled (then cooled water) or bottled water or water sanitized with 8 drops (about 1/8 teaspoon) of unscented household bleach per gallon of filtered water. Also, use filtered and boiled water to wash surfaces where food is prepared. Ice should be made with filtered and boiled water, bottled water or disinfected water.

11. What do I do with food and drink prepared during the advisory?

Throw away uncooked food, beverages or ice cubes if made or prepared using tap water during the day of the advisory.

12. How does a "Boil Water Advisory" affect feeding my infant?

Mothers who are breastfeeding should continue to breastfeed their babies. Wash and sterilize all baby bottles and nipples before each use. If this is not possible, then single-serve, ready to feed bottles of formula must be used with a sterilized nipple. Always filter and boil water before mixing concentrated liquid or powdered formula. If unable to boil filtered water, water may be disinfected as described for drinking.

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

Even if someone has consumed potentially contaminated water before they were aware of the boil water advisory, the likelihood of becoming ill is low. Anyone experiencing symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, with or without fever, should contact their healthcare provider. Symptoms associated with waterborne illness are also associated with foodborne illness, or even the common cold.

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

Illnesses from contaminated water occur principally by ingesting water. The major organisms that produce illnesses 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. Most of these illnesses are not usually serious or life-threatening except in the elderly, the very young or those with compromised immune systems.

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15. Is potentially contaminated water safe for household pets?

The same precautions that are taken to protect humans should be applied to household pets. Fish and other animals living in water should not be exposed to potentially contaminated water. If the animal's water needs to be changed use filtered and boiled or bottled water.

16. What happens after the boil water advisory has ended?

You will be notified by the City of Flint when the boil water advisory has been lifted. Once the boil advisory has been lifted, you must change the cartridge in your water filter. The water filter can then be used with the new cartridge.

17. Where can I get additional information?

www.cdc.gov