

# How to Use Water Safely During a Boil Water Advisory

What is a boil water advisory?

A boil water advisory is issued when harmful germs (e.g., E. coli bacteria, giardia parasite) may be in a drinking water supply. Drinking water contaminated with these germs can make people and animals very sick. Boiling will kill the germs and make the water safe to drink.

When a boil water advisory has been issued, how do I use water?

When a boil water advisory has been issued **don't** use the tap water to:

- drink
- cook
- make baby formula
- make juice
- make ice
- wash fruits or vegetables
- brush teeth
- fill a wading pool
- give to your pet

During a boil water advisory, use boiled water, bottled water, or water from another safe public supply not affected by the advisory. Throw away any ice in your freezer made with the water and sanitize the ice cube trays. Make ice with boiled water that's been cooled.

When you can't boil water, like in the backcountry or in emergency situations, go to the following pages to learn how to make your water safe to drink:

- [Drinking Water in the Backcountry](#)
- [Using Disinfectants to Make Drinking Water Safe When You Can't Boil it](#)

What if I have a weak immune system (immunocompromised)?

If you're immunocompromised, ask your doctor what to do during a boil water advisory. You might need to use boiled or bottled water to drink and cook with all the time.

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What's the right way to boil water?

To boil water, bring it to a rolling boil for at least 1 minute.

Be careful not to burn yourself or your child. Only boil as much water as you can safely lift without spilling. To boil water, use a pot placed on the back burner of a stove or a kettle. If you use an electric kettle, make sure you can hold down the automatic shut off switch to keep the water boiling for 1 minute. After the water has boiled for 1 minute, let it cool and pour it into a clean disinfected container with a cover. Keep it in the refrigerator until you need it.

For making formula for babies less than 4 months of age, boil the water for 2 minutes.

Can I use bottled water or buy water from self-serve water dispensers?

Sometimes you can use bottled water, but it depends on when and how the water was bottled. Bottling plants and/or water dispensers that use local water must treat the water to remove harmful germs. Check with an Environmental Public Health Office in your area (phone numbers below) about bottled water brands or water dispensers that have been treated so the water is safe. You can also use water bottled from another public water supply not affected by the advisory.

Is the water safe to use in water play areas?

No. The water is **not** safe to use in water play areas because there's a risk of people swallowing it and getting sick.

Are there ways to make water safe for other uses?

Water can be made safe from harmful germs for other uses:

- by adding **chemicals** (e.g., bleach). This water isn't safe to drink, but you can use it for cleaning dishes or areas in your kitchen (e.g., countertops).
- with **heat** — **boil water for one minute**

### Personal Hygiene

Can I use the water to wash my hands?

During a boil water advisory, you can use the water to wash your hands. Wash your hands with tap water and soap, making sure to lather for at least 20 seconds. Rinse your hands well with running water and dry them with a paper towel. After you dry your hands, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with more than 60% alcohol. Can I take a bath or shower?

During a boil water advisory, healthy adults can take a bath or shower. **Don't** swallow any water. An older child can take a shower with a hand-held showerhead, but **don't**



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spray any water near the face. Give your baby or young child a sponge bath to make sure he or she doesn't swallow water.

If you have an open wound, cut, blister, or a recent wound from surgery, use bottled water or water that has been boiled and cooled so you don't get an infection.

Can I brush my teeth?

During a boil water advisory, **don't** use tap water to brush your teeth. Use bottled water, water that has been boiled and cooled, or water from another safe source.

Can I wash my laundry?

During a boil water advisory, you can keep doing your laundry like normal.

### Cooking and Cleaning

If I have a water filtration device, is the water safe to drink or cook with?

If you have a water filtration device, **don't** use the water during a boil water advisory. Many filtration devices don't remove harmful germs. Check with the manufacturer to find out what your filtration device removes.

Can I cook with tap water?

Yes, you can use tap water for cooking, but only if the water comes to a boil for at least 1 minute (e.g., making soups, cooking pasta or rice).

Only use bottled water or water that has been boiled and cooled for washing vegetables, fruit, or other foods, if they are to be eaten raw or cannot be peeled.

Can I drink coffee made with untreated water?

During a boil water advisory, you can use your coffeemaker if it heats water to **70°C** or hotter. Most germs are killed at this temperature. Test the coffee temperature with a thermometer. Let the coffee sit in the pot for at least 5 minutes before you drink it. If your coffee maker doesn't heat the water to at least 70°C, use bottled or boiled water to make coffee.

It's hard to check pod-style coffee makers such as Keurig for the water temperature. It's best to use bottled water or previously boiled water in these machines.

Can I wash dishes by hand?

During a boil water advisory, wash and rinse dishes with hot water like normal. After dishes are rinsed, you need to sanitize (reduce germs to a safe level) them. To do this, soak your dishes for at least 2 minutes in a bleach solution.

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To make a bleach solution, add 10 mL (2 tsp.) of liquid, unscented bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite) to 5 litres of warm water. Let the dishes air dry completely.

Can I use my dishwasher?

You can use your dishwasher if it works well and has a hot temperature setting or sanitizer cycle.

If your dishwasher doesn't have a hot temperature setting:

- stop the dishwasher at the rinse cycle
- add 20 mL (4 tsp.) of liquid, unscented bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite)
- restart the dishwasher
- let the dishes dry completely on the heated dry cycle

How do I sanitize my countertop, cutting board or other kitchen surfaces?

Wash kitchen surfaces with soap and water, rinse, then wipe them down with a bleach solution. Make a new bleach solution every day so it works well to kill germs. You need to do this because bleach breaks down quickly once it's mixed with water.

To make a bleach solution, add 5 mL (1 tsp.) of liquid, unscented bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite) to 1 litre of room temperature water (must have been boiled, bottled, or hauled). Spray or pour the solution on surfaces that food will touch and let it sit for at least 2 minutes. Don't use vinegar to sanitize because it doesn't kill germs.

Can tap water be used for cleaning non-food contact surfaces?

Yes. You can clean surfaces such as floors and walls using tap water and your usual detergents.

### When the Advisory is Over

Once the boil water advisory is lifted, you need to flush, clean, and sanitize:

- water pipes
- water treatment devices
- plumbed appliances
- water storage tanks

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To make everything in your house safe:

- run cold water taps for at least 5 minutes before you use them. If you live in an apartment or condominium, run the taps for more than 5 minutes.
- flush, clean, and sanitize appliances with water line connections (e.g., fridges with water and ice dispensers) following manufacturer's instructions
- disinfect water filtration devices following manufacturer's instructions
- run your water softener through a regeneration cycle following manufacturer's instructions
- drain and refill your hot water heater if it's set below 45 °C
- flush, drain, clean, and sanitize your water tank (cistern) if there was unclean (contaminated) water in it

If you have any questions about your water, call an Environmental Public Health Office in your area.

For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health office.

Edmonton Main Office  
Calgary Main Office  
Lethbridge Main Office

780-735-1800 Grande Prairie Main Office  
403-943-2288 Red Deer Main Office  
403-388-6689 www.ahs.ca/eph

780-513-7517  
403-356-6366

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