

Boil-Water Notices: Precautions to Take

If you are under a boil-water notice

- Do **not** drink tap water.
- Do **not** use ice made from recent tap water.
- Do **not** use tap water to make drinks, juices, or fountain soft drinks.
- Cook with tap water **ONLY** if food is boiled for at least one minute.
- **Wash dishes**, fruits and vegetables in boiled water or water that has been disinfected with bleach. Using your home dishwasher is not recommended.
- **Brush your teeth** with boiled or bottled water.
- Wash your hands and **bathe as usual**. Bathing is safe as long as no water is swallowed.
- **Wash laundry as usual**. Laundry washed in hot or cold water is safe.

Disinfecting Water

- **Bring water to a rolling boil for 1 minute to kill most organisms.**
- **If you cannot boil your water**, mix 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. (This treatment will kill bacteria, but not parasitic organisms.) If water is muddy or cloudy, remove sediment by straining it through a cloth or filter paper before disinfecting.
- Alternatively, water may be treated with chlorine or iodine tablets.

When your boil-water notice is lifted

- **Flush faucets** for a total of 10 minutes to introduce system water throughout house plumbing.*Example:*
 - 1 faucet — run for 10 minutes
 - 2 faucets — run both for 5 minutes
 - 3 faucets — run each for 3-4 minutes
- Flush any faucet a minimum of 2 minutes to ensure clearing of the water line.
- **Discard any drinks**, ice, food, etc, made during the boil water notice.
- **Rewash** any food or drink contact items (knives, forks, plates, etc.) with cleared system water.
- **Check water filters** (in faucets, refrigerators and elsewhere) and replace if necessary.
- **Do not use water from your hot water heater** for drinking until several exchanges of the tank have occurred.
- **Run dishwasher** through a cycle or two before washing dishes.

Question and Answers

What if my water system loses pressure?

If water systems lose pressure, MSDH or the water system will issue a boil water notice. However, if you notice a loss of water pressure, you should boil your drinking water until you have been notified your water is safe. Bringing water to a rolling boil for one minute will kill most organisms. MSDH will test water samples collected from water supply systems and must have two consecutive days of

clear test samples. Typically, it takes a minimum of 48 to 72 hours to find out whether water is safe to drink from contaminated water supply systems.

Can I bathe and shave with water?

The water may be used for showering, baths, shaving or washing, as long as one does not swallow the water or allow it in the eyes or mouth. Parents should supervise children to make sure water is not ingested, and caregivers should supervise disabled individuals for the same reason. Those with recent surgical wounds, who have a chronic illness or are immune suppressed should consider using bottled or boiled water for bathing until their boil water notice is lifted.

Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food or make ice. Make sure to boil or disinfect water before use (see above). Drink only bottled, boiled or disinfected 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 disinfected water as described above. Ice should be made with boiled, bottled or disinfected water.

Again, you should not use contaminated water to wash and prepare food or make ice. If you use bottled water, make sure you know where it came from. Otherwise, water should be boiled or disinfected before use.

What organisms can be in contaminated water?

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 immune compromised.

Is bottled water safe to use?

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

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

When are boil water notices required?

Individual water systems issue precautionary boil-water notices when water pressure is lost. Water systems are responsible for notifying their customers directly using whatever means necessary when a self-imposed boil-water alert is issued.

When water testing by the state Public Health Laboratory indicates problems related to water quality, MSDH immediately issues a boil water press release and informs the local water system. For state-issued boil-water notices, the water system is responsible for notifying customers directly using whatever means necessary.

In addition to posting state-issued notices on this site, if notified by water system officials, MSDH will also post self-imposed boil-water notices. MSDH will issue press releases to radio, television, and newspaper in the affected area to supplement the public notification efforts of the water system.

How can I get more information?

Contact your public water system provider for more information about boil-water notices.