

What to do when your municipal water supplier issues “boil water” advisory”

What is a “Boil Water Advisory?”

A Boil Water Advisory (BWA) is issued to protect the health of the community from the possibility of waterborne infectious agents. A BWA is issued only after careful consideration among representatives from public health, regulatory agencies and municipal departments after positive tests (e.g., positive samples for fecal coliforms, changes in turbidity measurements), or line breaks.

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
- Brushing teeth

Severely immunocompromised 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, your local public health authority or other responsible authority may direct you to disinfect the water using household bleach, or to use an alternative supply known to be safe.

It is not necessary to boil tap water used for other household purposes, such as showering, laundry, bathing, or washing dishes. 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 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 odour or chemical quality of the water, such as activated carbon filters, it is still necessary to boil the water. Devices designed to disinfect the water, such as a UV light units, may be used as an alternative to boiling. If the water is cloudy, filtration may be required before disinfection. Check with the manufacturer if you are not certain.