



Using Water Safely in Schools 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 after cooling.

What immediate steps must a school take when a boil water advisory is issued?

- Safe water must be provided for students and staff.
- Post signs at all entrances and faucets, including the kitchen area and washrooms as a reminder of the boil water advisory and not to drink the water.
- Turn off or disconnect drinking fountains.
- Provide student and staff washrooms with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol content. Inform students and staff that the hand sanitizer should be used after hands are properly washed and dried.

When a boil water advisory has been issued, how should the water be used?

When a boil water advisory has been issued, **do not** use the tap water to:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| • drink | • wash fruits or vegetables |
| • make juice | • brush teeth |
| • make ice | • fill a water play table |
| • prepare foods | • give to pets |

During a boil water advisory use boiled water, bottled water or water from another safe public supply not affected by the advisory.

To make the water safe, **bring to a rapid rolling boil for at least one minute**. Boil only as much water in the pot that one can comfortably lift without spilling. Ensure water is cooled appropriately before using or before direct handling to prevent scalds.

What special precautions should people with a weakened immune system take?

If a student has a weakened immune system, they should consult their doctor for advice.

Is bottled water or water from self-serve water dispensers safe to use?

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 the Environmental Public Health Office (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 drink if an on-site water filtration device is used?

If you have a water filtration device, **do not** use the water during a boil water advisory. Many filtration devices do not remove harmful germs. Check with the manufacturer to find out what the filtration device does remove.

GENERAL HYGIENE DURING A BOIL WATER ADVISORY

Can tap water be used for handwashing?

Yes. Wash hands using tap water and soap, making sure to lather and scrub all surfaces of the hand for a minimum of 20 seconds. Rinse hands well with running water, and dry with a paper towel. After washing hands with tap water, **use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer** containing more than 60% alcohol. Ensure that hand sanitizer is provided at each handwashing station, including washrooms.

Can tap water be used for showering?

Healthy individuals may take showers with untreated tap water, if they are careful not to swallow any tap water. Younger children (elementary school age) should not use the water for showering unless properly instructed and supervised. People with open wounds, cuts, blisters or recent surgical wounds should not use the water for showering, unless measures are in place to prevent exposure to wound areas (such as covering the wound with a waterproof covering).

Can tap water be used for brushing teeth?

No. During a boil water advisory, **do not** use tap water to brush teeth. Use boiled water that is cooled, bottled water or water from another safe source.

Can tap water be used for washing laundry?

Yes. During a boil water advisory, continue washing laundry like normal. Ensure that a mechanical dryer (hot drying method) is used to completely dry the material.

Can tap water be used for general cleaning purposes?

Yes. Tap water can be used for general cleaning of surfaces and to prepare sanitizing solutions. Cleaned high touch surfaces should be sanitized with one of the approved sanitizers listed below, and allowed to air dry. Sanitizer concentration should be tested regularly with sanitizer test papers or other testing equipment, unless the sanitizer is premixed by the manufacturer and marked with an expiry date.

Approved Sanitizers:

- Chlorine solution: 100 ppm chlorine (1/2 teaspoon household bleach per litre of water).
- Quaternary Ammonia Solution: Generally 200 ppm. Follow manufacturer's instructions for correct dilution and contact time. The product must have a DIN issued by Health Canada.
- Iodine Solution: 12.5-25 ppm iodine. Follow manufacturer's directions.
- Accelerated Hydrogen Peroxide: 0.5% AHP. Follow manufacturer's instructions for correct dilution and contact time. The product must have a DIN issued by Health Canada.

Is the water safe to fill water play areas for children?

Water table play during a boil water advisory is discouraged. However, the following process will sanitize the water for safe play. Use water that has been previously boiled and cooled, or sanitize the water in a water play table by adding 45 ml (about 1.5 oz) of liquid household bleach to every 45 litres of water. Mix and let stand for at least 20 minutes prior to use.

PREPARING FOOD DURING A BOIL WATER ADVISORY

Can tap water be used to make coffee?

During a boil water advisory, the coffeemaker may be used if it heats water to **70°C** or hotter. Test the coffee temperature with a probe thermometer. Let the coffee sit in the pot for at least five minutes before drinking. If the coffee maker does not heat the water to at least 70°C, and does not incorporate a burner for 5-minute hold time, use bottled or boiled water to make coffee.

Can tap water be used to wash dishes by hand?

Yes. Wash and rinse dishes with hot tap water, and then sanitize the dishes to reduce the amount of germs to a safe level. Soak the dishes for at least two minutes in a bleach solution of 1 tablespoon of household bleach in 4 litres (20 cups) of warm water. Let the dishes air-dry completely.

Can domestic dishwashers be used?

A domestic dishwasher can be used if it works well and has a hot temperature setting or sanitizer cycle. Let the dishes dry completely, preferably using a heated dry cycle on the dishwasher. If the dishwasher does not have a hot temperature setting, it is recommended that dishes be sanitized using method outlined in the hand dishwashing question above.

How should counter tops, cutting boards or other kitchen surfaces be sanitized?

Tap water can be used for cleaning of kitchen surfaces and equipment, and to prepare sanitizing solutions. Cleaned surfaces and equipment should be sanitized with one of the approved sanitizers listed in the general cleaning question. If using a sanitizer other than bleach, follow manufacturer's instructions if rinsing is required prior to food contact.

Is there further information on safe food preparation for a public food establishment?

Follow the procedures listed in the document, "Using Water Safely in Food Establishments During a Boil Water Advisory". This document is available by contacting the local Environmental Health Officer.

PROCEDURES TO TAKE AFTER A BOIL WATER ADVISORY IS ENDED

- Flush all water-using fixtures by running the tap for five minutes. If the service connection is long or complex, consider flushing for a longer period of time.
- Ensure equipment with water line connections such as refrigerator water and ice dispensers are drained, flushed, cleaned and disinfected according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Flush, drain, clean and disinfect cisterns that contained the affected water source.
- Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle according to manufacturer's recommendations.
- Drain and refill hot water heaters that have been set below 45°C/110°F.

For more information about using water during a boil water advisory, contact the local Environmental Health Officer.

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