

Boil Water Guidelines for the Public Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why was I Advised to Boil My Water?

- A:** You may be asked to boil your tap water during an emergency or other situation, such as:
- A water main break or repairs;
 - If the water pressure drops due to equipment failure or power outages;
 - If tests show that potentially harmful microorganisms may be present in the water;
 - If the water source has been flooded; or
 - During other situations that warrant special action to protect the public's health.

Q: How does boiling make my tap water safe?

A: Boiling the water kills microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses, or protozoa that can cause disease. Boiling makes the tap water microbiologically safe.

Q: How long should I boil the water?

A: Bring tap water to a full rolling boil, let it boil for one minute, and let it cool before using.

Q: Can I boil water in the microwave?

A: Tap water can be boiled in the microwave in a microwave-safe container, provided that the water reaches a full rolling boil for one minute. Place a microwave-safe utensil in the container to keep the water from superheating (heating above the boiling point without forming steam or bubbles.)

Q: Do I have to boil the tap water used to make beverages?

A: Yes. Boil all of the tap water you use for making coffee, tea, mixed drinks, Kool-Aid or any beverage made with water. In addition, all tap water used for making ice for consumption must be boiled.

Q: Should I boil the tap water used to make baby formula?

A: Yes. Only use boiled tap water or bottled water for mixing formula for your baby.

Q: Do I need to boil water before using it to wash vegetables that will be eaten raw?

A: Yes. Boil all of the tap water you use for washing raw vegetables.

Q: Should I boil the tap water used in cooking?

A: All tap water used in cooking must first be boiled for one minute, unless the cooking process involves boiling for one minute or more.

Q: Do I have to boil my dish-washing water?

A: No. Adding a tablespoon of unscented, household bleach, such as Clorox, to a sink full of tap water should be sufficient to treat the water used for washing dishes. Bleach should also be added to the water used for rinsing dishes. Allow dishes and utensils to air dry before reuse. You may wash dishes in an electric dishwasher, but be sure to use it with its heating elements turned on. After washing in an electric dishwasher, dishes should be rinsed in water with a tablespoon of bleach added, and allowed to air dry before reuse.

Q: Should I boil tap water for brushing my teeth?

A: Yes. Any tap water that might be swallowed should be boiled before use.

Q: Is it necessary to boil water to be used for hand washing? Is any special soap necessary?

A: Yes. It is necessary to boil the tap water used for washing hands; however, no special soaps are necessary.

Q: What about my bath water?

A: It is recommended that you boil water for bathing or showering. If you do not boil water for bathing or showering, care should be taken to avoid getting water in the mouth or swallowing the water. Infants and toddlers should be sponge bathed with boiled water which has been allowed to cool. No special soaps are necessary. Care should be taken to prevent tap water that has not been boiled from getting into deep, open, or post-surgical wounds. Consult your physician or health care provider for wound care instructions.

Q: Do I need to use boiled water for washing clothes or flushing the toilet?

A: No.

Q: Do I still have to boil tap water if I have a water treatment device?

A: Yes. Devices designed to improve the taste, odor, or chemical quality of the water, such as activated carbon filters, will not remove harmful microorganisms from the tap water. Boil the tap water to make sure it is safe.

Q: Can I use bottled water instead of boiling tap water?

A: Yes. Bottled water can be used for all of the situations where boiled tap water is recommended in this brochure. Be sure that the bottled water is from a reliable source.

Q: Can I haul water from my neighbor's well or spring for drinking purposes?

A: No. You should only use water from an approved, tested source. Without routinely testing the water there is no way to know if the water is safe to drink.

Q: Should I boil the tap water I give my animals or pets?

A: You can boil the tap water you give to the animals in your care. Your veterinarian can tell you if this precaution is necessary.

Q: What should I do if I become sick?

A: See your family physician or healthcare provider. Your doctor may call the West Virginia Office of Environmental Health Services (304) 558-2981 for information about the boil water notice. Your doctor should notify the Local Health Department if he or she suspects your illness was caused by microorganisms in the water.

Some people may be more vulnerable to contaminants. People with weakened immune systems, such as people with cancer undergoing chemotherapy, organ transplant patients, people with HIV/AIDS or other immune system disorders, elderly persons, and infants can be at greater risk from infections. These people should seek advice about drinking water from their health care providers. Guidelines on ways to reduce the risk of infection from microbiological contaminants are available from the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at (800) 426-4791.

Q: How will I know when it is safe to drink my tap water?

A: You will be notified when tests show that the tap water is safe to drink. You may be asked to run water to flush the pipes in your home before using your tap water or be given other special instructions. Until you are notified, continue to boil all tap water for one minute before use.