VDH VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Office of Drinking Water
Division of Emergency Services

Boil Water Advisory FAQs

There are several reasons why you may be asked to boil your tap water:

- If tests show that harmful microorganisms could be present in the water
- If the water pressure drops due to equipment failure or power outages
    - Any uncontrolled drop below 20 psi for any amount of time due to a disruption in routine operations
- Due to water main breaks or repairs
- If the water source has been flooded
- Due to any other situations that warrant special action to protect consumers' health.

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

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.

What should I do if I become sick?

See your family physician or healthcare provider. Your doctor may call the Virginia Department of Health - Office of Drinking Water at (804) 864-7500 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, some elderly, 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 (800) 426-4791.

<u>General Information</u>

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

How long should I boil the water?

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

How do I boil water on the stovetop?

- When boiling water on the stovetop, use manageable-sized pots and do not overfill them. Place the pot on a rear burner if there are small children in the house. Let the water cool before transferring to another container.

Can I boil water in the microwave?

- Yes, 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).

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Boiling Water for Consumption

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

- Yes. Boil all 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.

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

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

Should I boil the tap water used in cooking?

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

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

- Yes. Boil all the tap water you use for washing raw vegetables.

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

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

Boiling Water for Hygiene and Cleaning

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

- No. It is not necessary to boil the tap water used for washing hands, and no special soaps are necessary. Be sure to scrub your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds and rinse them well under running water.
- If soap and water are not available, you may use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

What about my bath water or showering?

- There is no need to boil water for bathing or showering. Adults, teens, and older children can shower or bathe, though they should avoid getting water in the mouth or swallowing the water. Infants and toddlers should be sponge bathed. No special soaps are necessary.
- However, care should be taken to prevent water from getting into deep open or post-surgical wounds. Consult your physician or health care provider for wound care instructions.

What about shaving?

- Yes, you can shave as usual.

Should I boil tap water for brushing my teeth?

- Yes. Any tap water that might be swallowed should be boiled before use. Alternatively, you may use bottled water.

Do I have to boil water to wash my dishes?

- No. Wash and rinse the dishes as you normally would using hot water. Add a tablespoon of household bleach such as Clorox to a sink full of warm tap water and soak the rinsed dishes in the water for at least one minute. Allow dishes and utensils to air dry completely before reuse.
- You may wash dishes in an electric dishwasher but be sure to use it with its heating elements turned on. If your dishwasher reaches a final rinse temperature of at least 150 degrees Fahrenheit (66 degrees Celsius) or if it has a sanitizing cycle option, it is generally safe to use. If you are unsure if

your dishwasher has these features, after a washing cycle, you may rinse your dishes in a sink full of warm tap water with a tablespoon of bleach added and air dry completely for extra precaution.
- You may also opt to use disposable plates, cups, and utensils instead.

Do I need to use boiled water for washing clothes?
- No. It is safe to wash clothes as usual.

Do I need to use boiled water for flushing the toilet?
- No.

Safety of Alternatives to Boiled Tap Water

Can I use bottled water instead of boiling tap water?
- Yes. Bottled water can be used for all the situations where boiled tap water is recommended above. Be sure that the bottled water is from a reliable source.

Do I still have to boil tap water if I have a water treatment device such as a filter?
- 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.

Is it safe to use water or ice dispensed from my refrigerator?
- No. Do not use water from any appliance connected to your water line, such as ice and water from a refrigerator. Only boiled or bottled water should be used for consumption.

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

What should I do if there is a power outage, and I can't boil my tap water?
- In an emergency, boiling is the preferred method for making sure tap water is safe to drink. The following are acceptable alternatives if you cannot boil your tap water because of a power outage or loss of gas service:
- Use bottled water.
- Use liquid household bleach to disinfect tap water. The bleach product should be recently purchased, free of additives and scents, and should contain a hypochlorite solution of at least 5.25%. If the water is clear, add 8 drops of bleach (about ¼ teaspoon) to each gallon of water. Add twice the amount of bleach (16 drops, or ½ teaspoon) to each gallon if the water is cloudy. After adding bleach, the water should be stirred and allowed to stand for at least 30 minutes before use.
- Water purification tablets may also be used to disinfect tap water by following the manufacturer's instructions.

Where can I get more information?

Personal Preparation and Storage of Safe Water: CDC provides guidance on the amount of water needed for good health, as well as how to prepare and store safe water before and during an emergency.
Hygiene and Handwashing: CDC provides guidance on alternative hygienic practices when water is not available or is contaminated.
A Guide to Water Filters: CDC maintains a guide for filters that remove *Cryptosporidium* or *Giardia*.
EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline: 1-800-426-4791

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Procedures for Food Establishments Under a Boil Water Advisory

DRINKING WATER

- All drinking water should be boiled for one minute at a rolling boil.
- Disconnect all drinking water fountains.
- Provide bottled water from an approved source for customer consumption. Packaging, handling, storage and dispensing of bottled water should be protected from contamination.
- Any bulk water transported to the establishment should be transported in approved bulk water containers and should be delivered to an approved closed water system. This bulk water should be from an approved supply that is not under a boil water notice. Additional chlorine should be added to the transported water at a dosing rate of 1 to 2 ppm and test the chlorine at the point of delivery before transported water is put into service.
- Fountain drinks that are connected to any water lines are prohibited.
- Post Boil Water Notice in all areas of the establishment where water faucet is made available to the public.

ICE MANUFACTURING AND USE

- Disconnect all ice manufacturing machines in the affected establishment.
- All ice used during the boil water notice should be from approved sources. The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) should approve these sources.
- All ice must be packaged, transported, handled, stored, dispensed, and protected to prevent contamination.

HANDWASHING

- Establishments may use water for handwashing. Before handling food, single-use gloves must be utilized.
- Employees of a food establishment should regularly wash their hands as required. Hands should be thoroughly dried by single use towels.
- Where handwashing facilities are provided to the public, hand soap and single use towels are to be provided.

PERSONAL HYGIENE

- Water can be used to flush toilets.
- There is no need to boil bath or shower water. Instructions should be posted that care should be taken to make sure that children do not drink the water or get the water in their mouths during bathing. Infants and toddlers should be sponge bathed.
- Care should be taken to prevent water from getting into deep open or post-surgical wounds. Consult your physician or health care provider for wound care instructions.
- There is no need to boil water to launder clothing or linens.
- Only boiled water or bottled water should be used to brush teeth.

FOOD PREPARATION AND COOKING

- All water used in cooking should be boiled for one minute unless the cooking process involves boiling for more than one minute. The use of approved bottled water may be substituted for boiling the water.
- Boiled water or bottled water should be used to wash vegetables that will be eaten raw.

UTENSIL WASHING AND CLEANING

- The use of single service utensils is recommended for use where possible.
- Where three compartment sinks are utilized for washing, rinsing, and sanitizing utensils and equipment, hot water sanitizing with a heating element installed in third or sanitizing compartment that maintains water temperature of at least 170 degrees Fahrenheit is recommended and preferred. All utensils should be thoroughly air dried before putting into use.
- Mechanical dishwashing that maintains a final rinse temperature of 180 degrees Fahrenheit at the manifold or 160 degrees Fahrenheit contact temperature on the utensils is recommended and preferred. All utensils should be thoroughly air dried before putting into use.
- Where three compartment sink or mechanical dishwashing using a chemical sanitizer is utilized, sanitized utensils should be thoroughly dried. This procedure includes air drying for five minutes and if any solution remains, thoroughly drying with a clean paper towel.
- Utensils or equipment too large to sanitize by immersion should be rinsed, sprayed, or swabbed with an approved sanitizer solution at least twice the strength normally required. All these utensils and equipment should be thoroughly dried, following the drying procedures.