

What to Do During and After a Boil Water Order

Boil water orders are issued when harmful microbes, like *E.coli* bacteria or *Giardia* parasites, may be present in a drinking water supply. Consuming water contaminated with these microbes can make you, your family and your pets very sick. Boiling water will kill these microbes and make the water safe to drink.

How do I use water when a boil water order has been issued?

The water should **NOT** be used for:

- drinking
- cooking
- making infant formula and juices
- making ice
- washing fruits and vegetables
- brushing teeth
- filling wading pools
- drinking by pets

For these purposes you can use boiled water, bottled water or water from another public water supply not affected by the order. Discard all ice made previously and sanitize the ice cube trays (see the top of page 3 on how to sanitize). Make ice using cooled water that was previously boiled.

What should I do if I am immune-compromised?

Follow the advice of your physician and dietician. You may be advised to use boiled or bottled water for drinking and cooking even when a boil water order has not been issued.

How do I boil water properly?

The water should be brought to a rolling boil for at least one minute. Be careful not to burn yourself or your children. Boil only as much water as you can comfortably lift without spilling and place the pot on the back burner.

Can I use bottled water or buy water from self-serve water dispensers?

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 the harmful microbes. Check with Alberta Health Services for information about bottled water brands or water dispensers that would have the necessary treatment so the water is safe to drink. Water bottled from another public water supply not affected by the order is also safe to use.

Is the water safe for drinking or cooking if I have a water filtration device installed?

No. Many water filtration devices do not remove disease-causing microbes. You should check with the manufacturer to find out what your filtration device removes.

PERSONAL HYGIENE DURING THE BOIL WATER ORDER

Can I wash my hands?

Yes. Wash hands using tap water and soap making sure to lather for a minimum of 20 seconds. Rinse hands well with running water and dry them with paper towel. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing more than 60% alcohol after drying your hands.

Can I take a bath or shower?

Healthy adults may take baths and showers, but be careful not to swallow any water. Older children may be given a shower using a hand-held showerhead, but avoid their face. Infants and young children should be given a sponge bath to ensure they do not drink any water. People with open wounds, cuts, blisters or recent surgical wounds should use boiled or bottled water, or water from a safe source to prevent infections.

Can I brush my teeth?

No. Use boiled water that has cooled, bottled water or water from another safe source to brush your teeth.

Can I wash my laundry?

Yes. Continue doing laundry as you normally do.

FOOD PREPARATION DURING THE BOIL WATER ORDER

Can I drink coffee made with untreated water?

If your coffeemaker heats water to 70°C or hotter, most microbes will be killed. Test the coffee temperature using a thermometer. Let the coffee sit in the pot for at least 5 minutes before you drink it. If your coffee maker does not heat the water to at least 70°C, use bottled or boiled water for making coffee.

Can I wash my dishes by hand?

Yes. Wash and rinse the dishes as usual using hot water. Then sanitize the dishes, which means reduce the microbes on the dishes to a safe level:

- By soaking the rinsed dishes for at least two minutes in a bleach solution. Mix 2 teaspoons (10 ml) of liquid unscented bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite) into 20 cups (5 liters) of warm water. Let the dishes air dry completely, or
- By soaking the rinsed dishes in boiled water that is at least 77°C for two minutes. Let dishes air dry completely.

Can I use my dishwasher?

If your dishwasher has a hot temperature setting or sanitizer cycle, and is working properly, it can safely clean and sanitize your dishes. If your dishwasher does not have a hot temperature/sanitize setting, sanitize your cleaned dishes after running them through the dishwasher by either of the methods described above.

How do I sanitize counter tops, cutting boards and other kitchen surfaces?

Kitchen surfaces should be washed with soap, rinsed and sanitized using the bleach solution. Prepare the bleach solution every day so it can effectively remove microbes. Bleach breaks down quickly once it is mixed with water.

WHAT TO DO AFTER THE BOIL WATER ORDER

Once the boil water order has been lifted, water pipes, water treatment devices, plumbed appliances and water storage facilities need to be thoroughly flushed, cleaned and sanitized. For example:

- Run cold water faucets for at least one minute before using them. If you live in an apartment building or similar complex, you may need to flush for more than one minute.
- Ensure that appliances with water line connections, like refrigerators with water and ice dispensers, are flushed, cleaned and sanitized according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Disinfect any water filtration devices and run water softeners through a regeneration cycle, according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Drain and refill hot water heaters set below 45°C.
- Flush, drain, clean and sanitize cisterns.

Questions?

Call Health Link Alberta 1.866.408.5465

www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph.asp

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