



# BOIL WATER NOTICES

## Information for Consumers

A boil water order is issued to protect consumers when it is possible that the drinking water has been contaminated by microorganisms that can cause illness (i.e. germs or pathogens). Common reasons for a boil water notice include the loss of pressure in the water distribution system, loss of disinfection, and other water quality concerns caused by other events such as water line breaks, power outages and floods.

### **Q1 - Can I use my water for cooking?**

If a boil water notice was issued for your drinking water, any water used for food preparation or cooking should be boiled first or be from an acceptable alternate source (see Q14). Bring the water to a full rolling boil for at least one minute before adding the food item, like when you make pasta. If the water will be at a slight boil for a long time, then this is also protective. For example, you may be cooking beans or boiling chicken for 10 - 20 minutes.

### **Q2 - How should I wash fruit and vegetables and make ice?**

Fruits, vegetables, and any other foods that will not be cooked should be washed and rinsed with boiled (and then cooled) water or water from an acceptable alternate source. Similarly, ice should be made with either boiled water or water from an acceptable alternate source.

### **Q3 - Can I use my water for making baby formula or drinks?**

No, not without precautions! Any water used for baby food, formula, or making beverages must be boiled (and then cooled!) or be from an acceptable alternate source.

### **Q4 - Is potentially contaminated water safe for washing dishes?**

Hand-washed dishes: No! Use boiled (then cooled) water, water from an alternate source, or after washing with dish detergent rinse for a minute in dilute bleach (1 tablespoon of unscented bleach per gallon of water). Allow dishes, cutlery, cups, etc. to completely air dry before use.

Home dishwasher: Yes, if the hot wash is at least 170° F and includes a full dry cycle. However, most home dishwashers do not reach this temperature. If you are uncertain of the temperature of your dishwasher, rinse in dilute bleach and air dry as described for hand washed dishes.

### **Q5 - Is potentially contaminated water safe for washing clothes?**

Yes, it is safe to wash clothes as long as they are completely dried before being worn. However, increased turbidity that may occur during a boil water event may discolor clothing.

**Q6 - Is potentially contaminated water safe for bathing and shaving?**

The water may be used by healthy individuals for showering, bathing, shaving, and washing as long as care is taken not to swallow water and avoid shaving nicks. People with open wounds, cuts, blisters or recent surgical wounds and people who are immunocompromised or suffer from chronic illness should use boiled water (then cooled) or water from an acceptable alternate source. Children and disabled individuals should be supervised to ensure water is not ingested. Sponge bathing is advisable, and bathing time should be minimized to further reduce the potential for ingestion.

**Q7 - Can I brush my teeth with the water without boiling it?**

No. Any water you ingest or place in your mouth should be disinfected by boiling (and then cooled) or come from an acceptable alternate source.

**Q8 - How should I wash my hands during a boil water notice/order?**

Generally, vigorous washing with soap and your tap water is safe for basic personal hygiene. If you are washing your hands to prepare food, you should use boiled (then cooled) water, bottled water, or water from another acceptable source.

**Q9 - Can I use hand sanitizing lotion or wipes?**

Hand sanitizing wipes alone are not enough, especially to clean your hands for making food. Alcohol based sanitizers work against some common germs (like *E. coli*, and *Salmonella*) but may not be effective for *Cryptosporidium* and bacterium spores.

**Q10 - What infectious organisms might be present in contaminated water?**

Organisms of concern in New York State include: protozoa like *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium*; bacteria such as *Shigella* and *E. coli*; and viruses. These organisms can affect the gastrointestinal system, with or without fever, and result in: diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting. Most of these illnesses are not usually serious or life threatening except in the elderly, the very young or people who are immunocompromised. Skin contact can also lead to infection.

**Q11 - What if I have already consumed potentially contaminated water?**

Illness is possible, especially for people that already have a chronic illness or may be immunocompromised. This is why boil water notices are issued. Anyone experiencing symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and abdominal cramps should seek medical attention. These symptoms (with or without fever) are not unique to exposure to contaminated water and a doctor's involvement and medical testing are key components to identifying the cause of illness.

**Q12 – Does my in-home water treatment system provide enough protection?**

No! The Department of Health does not encourage residents to rely on home treatment units. It is recommended that you use boiled (and then cooled) water or an alternate source such as bottled water that is certified for sale in New York State.

Most in-home treatment devices are not designed to remove pathogens, and should not be relied on to protect you during a boil water event. Even treatment units that are designed to remove pathogens may not do so all the time unless they have been properly maintained.

Common home treatment devices that have limited or no ability to remove pathogens include: carbon filters, water softeners and other ion exchange units; sediment filters; chlorine removers; and aerators.

**Q13 - What should homeowners do when the boil water notice is lifted?**

- Flush household pipes/faucets first: run all your cold water faucets on full for at least five minutes each. If your service connection is long or complex (like in an apartment building) consider flushing for a longer period. Your building superintendent or landlord should be able to advise you on longer flushing times.
- Automatic ice makers: dump existing ice and flush by making and discarding three batches of ice cubes. Wipe down the ice bin with a disinfectant. If your water feed line to the machine is longer than 20 feet, increase to five batches.
- Hot water heaters, water coolers, in line filters, and other appliances with direct water connections or water tanks: run enough water to completely replace at least one full volume of all lines and tanks. If your filters are near the end of their life, replace them.
- Water softeners: run through a regeneration cycle.
- Reverse Osmosis (RO) units: replace pre filters, and check owner's manual.
- Replace other water filters, as they are disposable and may be contaminated. This applies especially to carbon filters and others that are near the end of their life.

**Q14 - What is an acceptable alternate source for safe drinking water?** Good alternate water sources include bottled water, water from another public water supply, water from a tanker provided by an emergency response agency, and water delivered by a NY State certified bulk water provider. Roadside springs are not a sure source of safe drinking water.