



## Frequently asked questions about What to Do During a Boiled Water Advisory

**From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency**

Boiled water advisories are issued by your public utility as a preventative measure. Boil water advisories are distributed when the water system has either recently tested positive for the presence of organisms that could cause illness (e.g. fecal or E. coli bacteria), or technical/physical problems in the water system have significantly increased the possibility of bacterial contamination. If you find yourself in an area during a boiled water advisory, certain precautions should be taken to ensure your water is free of illness-causing organisms. This FAQ can assist you by answering some of the most common questions associated with boiled water advisories.

### **When a boiled water advisory is issued, how should I prepare the water used for drinking?**

*To disinfect by boiling:*

- Fill a pot with water.
- Heat the water until bubbles come from the bottom of the pot to the top.
- Once the water reaches a rolling boil, let it boil for 1 minute.
- Turn off the heat source and let the water cool.
- Pour the water into a clean container with a cover for storage.

### **If you are unable to boil your water, disinfect it instead:**

*If tap water is clear:*

- Use unscented bleach (bleach that does not have an added scent).
- Add 1/8 teaspoon (8 drops or about 0.75 milliliters) of unscented household liquid bleach (common household bleach containing 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite) to 1 gallon (16 cups) of water.
- Mix well and wait 30 minutes or more before drinking.
- Store disinfected water in clean container with a cover.

### **What about the containers used for drinking and eating?**

Remember that containers may need to be sanitized before using them to store safe water.

*To sanitize containers:*

- Use unscented bleach (bleach that does not have an added scent).

- Make a sanitizing solution by mixing 1 teaspoon (5 milliliters) of unscented household (common household bleach containing 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite) liquid bleach in 1 quart (32 ounces, 4 cups, or about 1 liter) of water.
- Pour this sanitizing solution into a clean storage container and shake well, making sure that the solution coats the entire inside of the container.
- Let the clean storage container sit at least 30 seconds, and then pour the solution out of the container.
- Let empty container air dry OR rinse it with clean water that has already been made safe, if available.

**REMEMBER:** *Never mix bleach with ammonia, other cleaners or chemicals.*

### **What if I have a water filter, do I still need to boil water?**

Boil tap water even if it is filtered. Most kitchen and other household water filters typically *do not* remove bacteria or viruses.

### **What should I do when preparing food or cooking during a boiled water advisory?**

- Wash all fruits and vegetables with boiled water that has cooled or bottled water.
- Bring water to a rolling boil for 1 minute before adding food to cook.
- Use boiled water when preparing drinks, such as coffee, tea, and lemonade
- Wash food preparation surfaces with boiled water.

### **How does a boiled water advisory change how I feed my baby?**

- Breastfeeding is best. Continue to breastfeed. If breastfeeding is not an option:
  - Use ready-to-use baby formula, if possible.
  - Prepare powdered or concentrated baby formula with bottled water. Use boiled water if you do not have bottled water. Disinfect water for baby formula if you cannot boil your water (see above for directions on how to use bleach to disinfect water).
  - Wash and sterilize bottles and nipples before use.
  - If you cannot sterilize bottles, try to use single-serve, ready-to-feed bottles.

### **What about using the ice in the refrigerator?**

- Do not use ice from ice trays, ice dispensers, or ice makers.
- Throw out all ice made with tap water.
- Make new ice with boiled or bottled water.

### **Can I take a bath or shower?**

- Be careful not to swallow any water when bathing or showering.
- Use caution when bathing babies and young children. Consider giving them a sponge bath to reduce the chance of them swallowing water.

### **What about brushing teeth?**

Brush teeth with boiled or bottled water. Do not use untreated tap water.

### **What about washing dishes?**

Household dishwashers generally are safe to use if the water reaches a final rinse temperature of at least 150 degrees or if the dishwasher has a sanitizing cycle.

*To wash dishes by hand:*

- Wash and rinse the dishes as you normally would, using hot water.
- In a separate basin, add 1 teaspoon of unscented household liquid bleach for each gallon of warm water.
- Soak the rinsed dishes in the water for at least one minute.
- Let the dishes air dry completely.

### **What about washing clothes?**

It is safe to do laundry as usual.

### **What about providing water to pets?**

Pets can get some of the same diseases as people. It is a good idea to give them boiled water that has been cooled.

**For more information about personal health care and other important health information,  
visit us on the web:**

**[www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org)**

**Or call your local Health Department office at:**

**Coldwater**  
**517-279-9561 x 0106#**

**Hillsdale**  
**517-437-7395 x 0311#**

**Three Rivers**  
**269-273-2161 x 0233#**