

Q & A: How to use Tap Water Safely During a Boil Water Notice

What is the reason for this notice?

The boil water notice was issued because your tap water may be contaminated with waterborne pathogens (microorganisms) that can cause illness. These microorganisms can make you sick and are a particular concern for infants, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems.

How can I safely use the tap water?

Tap water should NOT be used for drinking, making infant formula and juices, cooking, making ice, washing fruits & vegetables, washing dishes or brushing teeth. Boil the tap water first or use another safer form of water described below.

How long should I boil the water?

Boil water for at least 1 minute (rolling boil). Preferably use a kettle so as to reduce the risk of burns. Boiling will NOT remove color/cloudiness from the water. Boiling only kills the harmful microorganisms.

Caution should always be exercised when handling boiling water to minimize the risk of burns.

What other method can I use to disinfect (treat) the tap water?

- **CHLORINE:** Household bleach (5%): Add 2 drops per litre & let stand for 30 minutes * If water is cloudy or cold add 4 drops per litre.
- **IODINE/CHLORINE TABLETS:** see manufactures' directions.

Note: Most household Brita type water filters will NOT remove microbial contaminants

Can I take a bath using the untreated tap water?

It is recommended that adults and older children take showers where possible. Avoid swallowing the water. Younger children could also be given a shower with a hand held showerhead. Avoid bathing young children in a tub because they are likely to swallow tub water.

Can I use the tap water for hand washing?

Yes, use soap and hot running water and scrub well.

How else can I disinfect my hands?

You can use alcohol-based hand disinfectants, containing more than 60% alcohol. These products are widely used in the health care setting after washing hands or in situations when water is not available. The pre-moistened towelettes used for cleaning babies at a diaper change are not effective for disinfecting hands and should not be used for this purpose.

Is it safe to use the dishwasher?

Yes, if your dishwasher has a hot setting (65° c or higher), it will disinfect the dishes. If your dishwasher does not have a hot setting, after finishing the cycle, soak dishes for 1 minute in a solution of 1oz (30 ml) of bleach mixed with 3 gallons of lukewarm water (13.5 litres). Let dishes air dry.

I wash dishes by hand. How do I disinfect them?

Boiled water can be used for washing dishes. Dishes washed in soap and hot water can also be rinsed in boiled water or disinfected with the following bleach solution. Mix 1 ounce (about 30 ml) bleach in to three gallons (13.5 litres) of water at room temperature for at least one minute. Let dishes air dry.

Can I use the untreated tap water to do my laundry?

Yes, continue doing laundry as you normally do.

I have a water treatment system in my house. Does this make the water safe for drinking or cooking?

Check the manufacturer specification. Not all household water treatment systems are certified to remove bacteria, viruses and protozoa.

I am immunocompromised. What should I do?

Severely immunocompromised individuals should always boil their tap water or use commercially bottled water for drinking and cooking.

How will I know when the boil water notice is lifted?

Once it has been determined that the water is safe to drink, the Water Supplier will issue a public notice informing customers that they are no longer required to boil their tap water.

What should I do when the boil water Notice has been lifted?

The Water Supplier will provide instructions on flushing water pipes within the home. It is important to carefully follow the instructions provided. Water heaters may need to be disinfected and flushed to remove any contaminated water. Some types of water treatment devices may need to be disinfected or replaced before being used. Check with the manufacturer for details.

Can I speak to a person in Public Health if I have health related questions about the boil water notice?

Yes, you can call Fraser Health Drinking Water Program in Abbotsford at 1-604 870-7906.

Reference: *Adapted from materials produced by the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and Health Canada*