



## Frequently Asked Questions: Boil Water Advisories

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**UPDATED: 02/2014**

### **What is the proper way to disinfect my water so that it is safe to drink?**

The best method of treatment is boiling. Boiling water kills harmful bacteria and parasites (freezing will not disinfect water). Bring water to a full rolling boil for at least 1 minute to kill most infectious germs. Let the water cool before use.

For areas without power, disinfect the tap water by adding 8 drops, about 1/8 teaspoon, of plain, unscented household bleach (4 to 6 percent active ingredient) per gallon of water and allow the water to stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy, repeat the procedure. Use a container that has a cap or cover for disinfecting and storing water to be used for drinking. This will prevent contamination. If your well was flooded, boiling the water is the safest action, since bleach disinfection does not kill certain parasites.

### **How should I wash my hands during a boil water advisory?**

When using a public water supply, vigorous hand washing with soap and tap water is safe for basic personal hygiene. If you are washing your hands to prepare food, if possible, you should use boiled (then cooled) water, disinfected water or bottled water with hand soap.

### **Is potentially contaminated water safe for washing dishes or clothes?**

Yes, if you rinse hand-washed dishes for a minute in a bleach solution (1 tablespoon bleach per gallon of water). Allow dishes to completely air dry. Most household dishwashers do not reach the proper temperature to sanitize dishes. It is safe to wash clothes in tap water.

### **Is potentially contaminated water safe for bathing and shaving?**

The water may be used for showering, baths, shaving and washing, as long as it is not swallowed or gets in the eyes, nose or mouth. Children and individuals with disabilities should have their bath supervised to ensure water is not swallowed. The time spent bathing should be minimized. Though the risk of illness is low, individuals who have recent surgical wounds, are immunosuppressed, or have a chronic illness may want to consider using bottled or boiled water for cleansing until the advisory is lifted.

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

Fruits and vegetables should be washed with boiled (then cooled) water, bottled water or water disinfected with 8 drops (approximately 1/8 teaspoon) of unscented household bleach per gallon of water. Ice should be made with boiled water, bottled water or disinfected water.

### **What if I have already consumed potentially contaminated water?**

Even if someone has consumed potentially contaminated water from either a public water system or a private well before they were aware of the boil water advisory, the likelihood of becoming ill is low. However, anyone experiencing symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, with or without fever, should seek medical attention.

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

Disease transmission from contaminated water occurs principally by drinking water. The major organisms of concern are as follows:

- Protozoa such as Giardia and Cryptosporidium
- Bacteria such as Shigella, E. coli
- Viruses such as Norovirus and Hepatitis A

These organisms primarily affect the gastrointestinal system, causing diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting with or without fever. These illnesses can be serious or life threatening, especially in the elderly, the very young or those who are immunocompromised.

For more information, please contact your local county health department or visit [www.floridahealth.gov](http://www.floridahealth.gov) or [www.floridadisaster.org](http://www.floridadisaster.org).