

## **Boil Water Advisory Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What are the reasons for a Boil Water Advisory?**

There are different reasons for issuing a boil water advisory.

- A boil water advisory can be based on bacteriological testing, including the finding of bacteria or parasites.
- A boil water advisory can be based on information indicating that the water is not safe to drink, for example, the absence of disinfection residual in the drinking water. (Disinfection is a cleaning process that destroys most disease-causing micro-organisms.)
- A boil water advisory can follow an outbreak of illness in the community that has been linked to consumption of the water.

Always follow the Health Unit's recommendations on water use.

### **How should I use water when a boil water advisory has been issued?**

The water should NOT be used for drinking, making infant formula and juices, cooking, making ice, washing fruits, vegetables or brushing teeth. For these purposes, boiled water or bottled water should be used. The water should be brought to a rapid rolling boil for one minute. Place the pot on the back burner to avoid scalds. Boil only as much water in a pot as you can comfortably lift without spilling. Throw out all ice and disinfect the ice cube trays. Make ice using boiled, cooled water.

Adults and teens may shower with untreated water as long as no water is swallowed. Older children could also be given a shower with a hand held shower head, avoiding the face. Younger children should be sponge-bathed instead of bathing in a tub because they are likely to swallow tub water.

### **What about hand washing?**

The water can be used for hand washing **if** the boil water advisory has been issued as a precaution and there is no outbreak of human illness.

If the boil water advisory has been issued because of an outbreak, water can be used for hand washing **after** the following emergency water treatment: Place 1.5 ounces (about 45 ml) liquid household bleach in 10 gallons (45 litres) water. Mix and let stand for at least 10 minutes before using.

### **What are other ways of disinfecting hands?**

You can use alcohol-based hand disinfectants containing more than 70% alcohol. These products are widely used in health care settings and in situations where washing water is not available. The wet wipes used for cleaning babies at diaper change are not effective for disinfecting hands and should not be used for this purpose.

### **Can we use our dishwasher?**

If the dishwasher has a hot setting, it safely disinfects dishes. If your dishwasher does not have a hot setting, after finishing the cycle, soak dishes for 1 minute in a solution of 1 ounce (30 ml) of bleach mixed with 1 gallon of lukewarm water (4.5 litres). Let dishes air dry.

### **How should hand washing of dishes be done?**

You could use boiled water 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 one ounce (about 30 ml) bleach with 4.5 litres (1 gallon) of water at room temperature for at least one minute. Let dishes air dry.

### **How do I disinfect counter tops, chopping boards or utensils which have come into contact with raw meat?**

Counter tops, chopping boards or utensils which have come into contact with raw meat should be washed with soap and hot water first, then disinfected with a bleach solution stronger than that used for emergency hand disinfection. Mix 1/4 cup (60 ml) bleach into one gallon (4.5 litres) of water for this purpose. Do not reuse or store this solution, but make it fresh daily.

### **What about doing laundry?**

Continue doing laundry the way you usually do. If you have to launder sheets heavily soiled with feces, carefully remove feces before you place the sheets into the washer, without much agitation of the cloth. Use rubber gloves when handling heavily soiled sheets.

### **Can tap water be used in wading pools?**

The water is not safe to use in wading pools. Water usually gets into the mouths of small children, providing a possibility for infection.

### **Does filtered water need to be boiled?**

Filtering water does not make it safe for drinking or cooking. Filtered water should also be brought to a rolling boil for one minute before drinking or using it for cooking.

### **Are there special recommendations for immuno-compromised persons?**

Immuno-compromised persons should always follow their physician's and dietitian's advice. You might be advised to use bottled water or to boil water for drinking/cooking, even in the absence of a boil water advisory.

### **How is the decision made to lift a boil water advisory?**

The Ontario Drinking Water Objectives state that the Medical Officer of Health should continue the boil water advisory until two consecutive sets of samples taken from the water system that has been affected show the water is safe for drinking. The Medical Officer of Health may choose not to lift the boil water advisory even if two acceptable samples are obtained.

## **Is there a procedure to follow after the boil water advisory is lifted?**

Yes. Run cold water faucets for one minute before using the water. Run drinking fountains for one minute before using the water. Flush all garden hoses by running cold water through them for one minute. Special precautions must be taken for drinking water systems that have water treatment equipment installed. Please consult with a Public Health Inspector by calling **613-735-8654 extension 555**.

### **Child Care Facilities**

- Run cold faucets for one minute before using the water.
- Run drinking fountains for one minute before using the water.
- Drain and refill all water play stations.
- Resume usual bathing practices for young children.

### **Health Care Facilities**

- Re-start, flush and sanitize any water-using fixture or piece of equipment in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications. This may vary from fixture to fixture. Consult the facility engineer and/or the manufacturer when re-starting the equipment.
- Drain water-holding reservoirs (in large buildings) in consultation with the facility engineer and health department.
- Run cold faucets for one minute before using the water.
- Backwash pool filters and change media or water.
- Water filters, softeners and treatment devices may need to be completely replaced. Consult with the facility engineer and/or the fixture manufacturer for specific guidance when re-starting equipment.
- Resume usual bathing practices and care for patients with breaks in the skin.

### **Dentists**

- Re-start and flush any water-using fixture or piece of equipment in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications. This may vary from fixture to fixture. Consult your facilities engineer and/or the manufacturer when re-starting the equipment.
- Managers of large buildings with water-holding reservoirs should consult with their facility engineer and health department about draining the reservoir.
- Run cold faucets for one minute before using the water.
- Run drinking fountains for one minute before using the water.

### **Food Premises**

- Run cold faucets for one minute before using the water.
- Run drinking fountains for one minute before using the water.
- All water-using fixtures or pieces of equipment should be re-started, flushed and sanitized in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications. This may vary from

fixture to fixture. The fixture manufacturer should be consulted for specific guidance when re-starting equipment.

- Water filters, softeners and treatment devices may need to be completely replaced.

*Compiled by Renfrew County and District Health Unit. Updated December 2016.*