

Boil Water Advisory

For Drinking Water Only

What to do when you're advised to boil your water

Boil water advisories are issued when a municipal, community or local water supply is at risk of microbial contamination. Advisories are issued by a Medical Officer of Health and should be followed until you are told the risk of contamination is over.

Individual private well owners may also be advised by a laboratory to boil their water if test results show bacteria are present in the well water. Boiling your drinking water will kill microorganisms (bacteria, viruses, protozoa) that could cause illness.

Most advisories are only for tap water used as drinking water – the water can still be used for bathing, showering, laundry and washing dishes. If the risk of contamination is more severe, the advisory will state clearly that the boil water applies to all domestic uses of tap water. (See Boil Water Advisory Fact Sheet #2 “Boil Water Advisory - For All Domestic Uses”).

When a boil water advisory is issued for the water source in your area, you will receive a public notice. It will state the reason for the advisory and any special instructions you need to follow.

The boil water advisory instructions apply even if you have a water treatment device in your house. These

devices may not kill or remove microorganisms that are in your water supply.

Anyone who has a weakened immune system (ex: cancer patient, someone taking immune suppressing medication, etc.) should contact their doctor or public health professionals for advice. It may be advisable to take more precautions as listed under “Boil Water Advisory - For All Domestic Uses”.

Private Wells

Private well owners are responsible for assessing the risk to their own well. Wells should be tested for bacteria at least once a year. Routine testing is recommended at least once a year under worst-case conditions, such as spring snow melt or heavy rains.

In circumstances where a significant risk of contamination may be present (ex: the well has been overtopped by flood water, other nearby wells are contaminated, or there is a change in colour, clarity, odour or taste), boiling your water as a precaution is recommended until the risk has passed. The well should be tested after the risk has passed and water should not be consumed until test results confirm it is safe to drink.

Boil water advisory for drinking water only

Tap water should be brought to a rolling boil for one minute and then stored in clean containers. A container of boiled water may be stored in the refrigerator to keep it cold.

Once the water has been boiled, it is safe to use for:

- drinking
- making infant formula and juice
- cooking
- making ice
- washing fruits and vegetables
- brushing teeth and soaking false teeth
- feeding pets

Get rid of all ice, infant formula, juice, drink mixes, etc. that were made before the boil water advisory was issued.

Use usual precautions for infants under 6 months, (ex: sterilize bottles in boiling water).

An alternative to boiling water is to use water from a known safe source (ex: bottled water). Be aware that the advisory may also apply to local water bottlers or haulers if they are using the same water source.

You can use tap water for washing hands, dishes and laundry. Follow normal precautions when washing hands and dishes. Wash hands properly, rubbing all parts of the hand with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Dishes should be air dried and not wiped.

Adults and teens can shower or bath as long as they don't swallow any water. Older children can be given a

shower with a hand-held showerhead, avoiding the face. Younger children should be sponge-bathed only, because they are most likely to swallow tub or shower water.

When boiling water, care must be taken to avoid burns and scalding. Place kettles and pots on back burners and away from counter edges. If you are boiling water in a microwave, put a glass rod, wooden or plastic microwave-safe stick (never metal) in the container so you do not super heat the water.

When a boil water advisory is lifted

When your water supply is safe again, the boil water advisory will be lifted and you will get a public notice stating you can use the tap water as usual, after completing the following steps:

- Flush out your household water pipes to ensure they contain safe water before using them. To do this, turn on one hot water tap and let it run until the water is cold. This will drain the hot water heater and refill it with safe water.
- Then, turn on all your cold water taps, faucets, fountains, showerheads and outside hose spigots and let them run for five minutes.
- Remove and clean all screens on taps and faucets.
- Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle.
- Replace any water filter cartridges in water treatment devices and follow the maintenance instructions in the owner's manual.

Note: Private well owners should only use well water after a water test confirms it is safe to drink again.

For more information

For more information on drinking water safety, water treatment devices or to receive a copy of other drinking water fact sheets, please visit the Office of Drinking Water website at www.manitoba.ca/drinkingwater or contact the Private Well, Education and Outreach Co-ordinator at 204-948-1351. To locate a local office near you, please refer to the website at www.manitoba.ca/waterstewardship/odw/reg-contacts/index.html.

For information on certification for water treatment devices, visit www.nsf.org.

For more information on how to reduce the risk of well contamination and testing procedures, please see Well Water Fact Sheet #1 "How to Reduce the Risk of Well Water Contamination" and Well Water Fact Sheet #2 "How to Test Well Water for Bacteria".

For information on well driller reports, well construction or sealing of unused wells, contact Manitoba Conservation and Water Stewardship, Groundwater Management Section at 204-945-6959.

For health information, contact Health Links at 204-788-8200 in Winnipeg; toll free at 1-888-315-9257 or contact your local public health office. To find your nearest office, go to: www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html.