

Contact: Pinellas County Health Department
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-- COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING BOIL WATER ADVISORIES --

1. What is the proper way to disinfect my water so that it is safe to drink?

The preferred 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 organisms (germs). For areas without power, disinfect the tap water by adding 8 drops, about 1/8 teaspoon, of plain unscented household bleach 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 disinfection does not kill certain parasites.

2. How should I wash my hands during a boil water advisory?

Based on the current conditions of the affected public water supplies, vigorous hand washing with soap and your tap water is safe for basic personal hygiene. If you are washing your hands to prepare food, if at all possible, you should use boiled (then cooled) water, disinfected or bottled water with hand washing soap.

3. Is potentially contaminated water (where *Cryptosporidium* is not the significant contaminant) 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.

4. Is potentially contaminated water safe for bathing and shaving?

The water may be used for showering, baths, shaving and washing, so long as care is taken not to swallow or allow water in eyes or nose or mouth. Children and disabled individuals should have their bath supervised to ensure water is not ingested. The time spent bathing should be minimized. Though the risk of illness is minimal, 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.

5. How should I wash fruit and vegetables and make ice?

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

6. 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. Anyone experiencing symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, with or without fever, should seek medical attention.

7. What infectious organisms might be present in contaminated water?

Disease transmission from contaminated water occurs principally by ingesting water. The major organisms of concern are protozoa such as Giardia and Cryptosporidium, and bacteria, such as Shigella, E. coli and viruses. These organisms primarily affect the gastrointestinal system, causing diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting with or without fever. Most of these illnesses are not usually serious or life threatening except in the elderly, the very young or those who are immunocompromised.

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