

Guide to Using Water Safely During a Boil Water Advisory

GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR CONSUMERS

During a Boil Water Advisory (BWA), water should NOT be used for drinking, food preparation, making infant formula and juices, cooking, making ice, washing fruits or vegetables, or brushing teeth. For these purposes, boiled water, bottled water or chlorinated water should be used.

To boil water:

The water should be brought to a rapid rolling boil and boiled for one minute. Make ice using boiled, cooled water. Discard all ice made previously and disinfect the ice cube trays.

Note: Chemicals already present in the water will become more concentrated with boiling.

To chlorinate water:

Add 1.25 ml (1/4 teaspoon) of unscented liquid household bleach (such as Javex) to 4 litres (1 gallon) of water. Mix well and allow it to stand for a minimum of 15 minutes.

Guidelines for Specific Water Use:

Bathing or showering

Adults and teens may shower with untreated water as long as no water is swallowed. Older children can be given a shower with a hand held showerhead, avoiding the face. Younger children should be sponge-bathed instead of bathing in a tub so water will not be swallowed. For brushing teeth, use bottled or boiled water.

Handwashing

If the Boil Water Advisory has been issued as a precaution and no outbreak of human illness has occurred, there is no need for additional hand disinfection with bleach solution or alcohol, using the measures described below.

If the boil water advisory has been issued because of an outbreak, water can be used for handwashing after the following emergency water treatment: Place 1.5 oz (about 45 ml) liquid household bleach in 10 gallons (45 litres) water. Mix and let stand for at least 15 minutes prior to use.

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.

Cleaning and disinfecting

Toys should be cleaned and disinfected. If the toys are visibly soiled, wash them first with soap and water, and then disinfect with a freshly prepared bleach solution (1/4 cup (about 60 ml) bleach in 1 gallon (4.5 litres) of water). Dip toys into this solution and air-dry them. Cloth and plush toys could be washed or dry-cleaned.

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Countertops, 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 (about 60 ml) bleach into 1 gallon (4.5 litres) water for this purpose. Do not reuse or store this solution, but make it fresh daily.

Dishwashing

If your 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 one minute in a solution of 1oz (30 ml) of bleach mixed with 3 gallons of lukewarm water (13.5 litres). Let dishes air dry. If you wash dishes by hand, 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 1 oz (about 30 ml) bleach into 3 gallons (13.5 litres) of water at room temperature for at least one minute. Let dishes air dry.

Laundry

Continue doing laundry the way you usually do. If you have to launder sheets heavily soiled with faeces, wear rubber gloves and carefully remove the faecal matter, without much agitation of the cloth, before you place the sheets into the washer.

Wading pools

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

Other water treatment

Filtered water should also be brought to a rolling boil for one minute before drinking or using it for cooking.

Steps to Take after the Boil Water Advisory is Lifted

Run cold water faucets and drinking fountains for one minute before using the water. Flush all garden hoses by running cold water through them for one minute. Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle. Drain and refill hot water heaters set below 45°C (normal setting is 60°C).

For more information or to speak with a Public Health Inspector contact York Region *Health Connection* at **1-800-361-5653** or **TTY 1-866-252-9933**.

Excerpts from the Ontario Ministry of Health website at www.gov.on.ca/health
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