



BOIL WATER NOTICES

Checklist for Food Service Establishment Operators

Boil water orders and notifications are issued to protect public health when treated water is found to be unsafe for public consumption, or when there is reason to believe that the water may become unsafe. These orders or notices are used in response to microbiological contamination or to address conditions that create a potential for contamination from simple waterline breaks to more complex matters such as interruption of treatment, power outages or floods.

When a boil water order or notice is issued for your establishment, the water from your tap is not safe to use for drinking, mixing in cold beverages such as juice or soda, making ice, or preparing or washing food that will not be cooked. If potential exposures cannot be controlled, the facility must be closed until the drinking water is determined to be safe for consumption.

Here are steps that you must take to operate safely when a boil water notice is effect. Please be sure all of your employees implement safety measures until further notice.

First:

- Discard all foods prepared with tap water unless you are certain that the food was thoroughly cooked, such as with boiled foods and baked goods, or that the product was made before the water emergency went into effect.
- Discard ice or cold beverages made with tap water unless you are certain that the ice and/or beverages were made before the water emergency went into effect.
- Post a clearly written “Do Not Drink” notice on all publicly accessible sinks, spigots and drinking fountains. Turn off all drinking fountains if possible.
- Turn off all post-mix beverage appliances and ice machines. Post clearly written notes on the machines that say “Do Not Use”.
- Discuss the importance of proper hygiene and glove use with employees. These routine protective measures become even more important during boil water emergencies.
- Be sure all staff on all shifts understand and implement all needed measures.

Next:

- Consider removing menu items that are difficult to prepare with limited water. If appropriate, add or switch to prepared foods, pre-washed produce, canned vegetables, single-service tableware, etc.
- Provide bottled or canned beverages; or use a pre-mix beverage machine with the water and ice dispensers turned off.

- Use bagged or prepackaged ice from a safe, approved alternate source such as a commercial supplier.
- Tap water may be used for:
 - food preparation when the food and water is boiled as part of the cooking process such as cooking pasta or soup;
 - coffee makers;
 - preparing, washing and sanitizing solutions for food contact surfaces as long as the surfaces are allowed to completely air dry before use;
 - washing floors and walls with your usual cleaning agent; and,
 - hand washing with soap and water. An antimicrobial hand sanitizer that does not require water is not an acceptable substitute for proper hand washing but is a good addition.
- Boil tap water if it will be used for drinking or for washing or preparing food that will not be cooked. The water must be heated to a **FULL ROLLING BOIL FOR AT LEAST ONE MINUTE** and then **COOLED** before use.
 - Consider using commercially bottled water or water from a safe, approved alternate source.
 - Follow normal procedures for hand washing dishes, cutlery, pots and pans which include a final sanitizing rinse with a dilute bleach solution of 1 tablespoon of regular unscented bleach (5.25%) per gallon of water and allowing the items to completely air dry before use.
 - Commercial or home-style dishwashers may be used if they are operated as per the manufacturer's instructions. Allow items to completely air dry before use.

After the boil water notice is lifted:

- Flush all water lines for at least 5 minutes and then clean and sanitize all sinks and fixtures. If your service connection is long or complex (as found in a commercial plaza), consider flushing the water lines for a longer period. Your building superintendent or landlord should be able to advise you on longer flushing times.
- Flush and disinfect all equipment with direct water connections such as soda dispensing machines, ice machines, drinking fountains and steam tables per the manufacturer's instructions. Run equipment for a full cycle and flush contents to waste.
- Flush appliances, such as water heaters and water tanks. Backwash or replace any water filters per the manufacturer's instructions.
- Clean and sanitize all food/beverage/ice equipment and food contact surfaces that were in use at the time of the water emergency.

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Information for Residents and Homeowners

For basic boil water facts see the fact sheet “Basic Information for All Consumers”. Detailed information for other consumers, such as food service establishments, is available from the NYS Department of Health or your local Health Department. If a “Do Not Use” notice is issued, additional precautions will be needed, contact your water supplier or local Health Department for guidance.

Q1 - Can I use my water for cooking?

If a boil water notice was issued for your drinking water, any water used for food preparation or cooking should be boiled first or be from an acceptable alternate source (see Q13). Bring the water to a full rolling boil for at least one minute before adding the food item, like when you make pasta. If the water will be at a slight boil for a long time, then this is also protective. For example, you may be cooking beans or boiling chicken for 10 - 20 minutes.

Q2 - How should I wash fruit and vegetables and make ice?

Fruits, vegetables, and any other foods that will not be cooked should be washed and rinsed with boiled (and then cooled) water or water from an acceptable alternate source. Similarly, ice should be made with either boiled water or water from an acceptable alternate source.

Q3 - Can I use my water for making baby formula or drinks?

No, not without precautions! Any water used for baby food, formula, or making beverages must be boiled (and then cooled!) or be from an acceptable alternate source.

Q4 - Is potentially contaminated water safe for washing dishes?

Hand-washed dishes: No! Use boiled (then cooled) water, water from an alternate source, or after washing with dish detergent rinse for a minute in a dilute bleach (1 tablespoon of unscented bleach per gallon of water). Allow dishes, cutlery, cups, etc. to completely air dry before use.

Home dishwasher: Yes, if the hot wash is at least 170° F and includes a full dry cycle. However, most home dishwashers do not reach this temperature. If you are uncertain of the temperature of your dishwasher, rinse in dilute bleach and air dry as described for hand washed dishes.

Q5 - Is potentially contaminated water safe for washing clothes?

Yes, it is safe to wash clothes as long as they are completely dried before being worn. However, increased turbidity that may occur during a boil water event may discolor clothing.

Q6 - Is potentially contaminated water safe for bathing and shaving?

The water may be used by healthy individuals for showering, bathing, shaving, and washing as long as care is taken not to swallow water and avoid shaving nicks. People with open wounds, cuts, blisters or recent surgical wounds and people who are immunocompromised or suffer from chronic illness should use boiled water (then cooled) or water from an acceptable alternate source. Children

and disabled individuals should be supervised to ensure water is not ingested. Sponge bathing is advisable, and bathing time should be minimized to further reduce the potential for ingestion.

Q7 - Can I brush my teeth with the water without boiling it?

No! Any water you ingest or place in your mouth should be disinfected by boiling (and then cooled) or come from an acceptable alternate source.

Q8 - How should I wash my hands during a boil water notice/order?

Generally, vigorous washing with soap and your tap water is safe for basic personal hygiene. If you are washing your hands to prepare food, you should use boiled (then cooled) water, bottled water, or water from another acceptable source.

Q9 - Can I use hand sanitizing lotion or wipes?

Hand sanitizing wipes alone are not enough, especially to clean your hands for making food. Alcohol based sanitizers work against some common germs (like *E. coli*, and *Salmonella*) but may not be effective for *Cryptosporidium* and bacterium spores.

Q10 - What infectious organisms might be present in contaminated water?

Organisms of concern in New York State include: protozoa like *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium*; bacteria such as *Shigella* and *E. coli*; and viruses. These organisms can affect the gastrointestinal system, with or without fever, and result in: diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting. Most of these illnesses are not usually serious or life threatening except in the elderly, the very young or people who are immunocompromised. Skin contact can also lead to infection.

Q11 - What if I have already consumed potentially contaminated water?

Illness is possible, especially for people that already have a chronic illness or may be immunocompromised. This is why boil water notices are issued. Anyone experiencing symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and abdominal cramps should seek medical attention. These symptoms (with or without fever) are not unique to exposure to contaminated water and a doctor's involvement and medical testing are key components to identifying the cause of illness.

Q12 - What should homeowners do when the boil water notice is lifted?

- Flush household pipes/faucets first: run all your cold water faucets on full for at least five minutes each. If your service connection is long or complex (like in an apartment building) consider flushing for a longer period. Your building superintendent or landlord should be able to advise you on longer flushing times.
- Automatic ice makers: dump existing ice and flush by making and discarding three batches of ice cubes. Wipe down the ice bin with a disinfectant. If your water feed line to the machine is longer than 20 feet, increase to five batches.
- Hot water heaters, water coolers, in line filters, and other appliances with direct water connections or water tanks: run enough water to completely replace at least one full volume of all lines and tanks. If your filters are near the end of their life, replace them.
- Water softeners: run through a regeneration cycle.
- Reverse Osmosis (RO) units: replace pre filters, and check owner's manual.
- Replace other water filters, as they are disposable and may be contaminated. This applies especially to carbon filters and others that are near the end of their life.

Q13 - What is an acceptable alternate source for safe drinking water?

Good alternate water sources include bottled water, water from another public water supply, water from a tanker provided by an emergency response agency, and water delivered by a NY State certified bulk water provider. Roadside springs are not a sure source of safe drinking water.