

# How to Use Water Safely in Your School During a Boil Water Advisory

## *What is a boil water advisory?*

A boil water advisory is issued when harmful germs (e.g., *E.coli* bacteria, *Giardia* parasite) may be in a drinking water supply. Drinking water contaminated with these germs can make people and animals very sick. Boiling will kill the germs and make the water safe to drink.

## *What immediate steps must a school take when a boil water advisory is issued?*

- Safe water must be provided for students and staff.
- Signs should be posted at all faucets, including the entrance, kitchen area and washrooms as a reminder of the boil water advisory and not to drink the water. See attached signs.
- Turn off or disconnect drinking fountains.
- Provide student and staff washrooms with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that has at least 60% alcohol content. Inform students and staff that the hand sanitizer should be used after hands are properly washed and dried. See attached sign.

## *When a boil water advisory has been issued, how should the water be used?*

When a boil water advisory has been issued, **do not** use the tap water to:

- drink
- prepare foods
- make juice
- make ice
- wash fruits or vegetables
- brush teeth
- give to pets

During a boil water advisory use boiled water, bottled water or water from another safe public supply not affected by the advisory. Throw away any ice in your freezer made with the water, and sanitize the ice cube trays (see next page). Make ice with boiled water that is cooled.

## *What is the right way to boil water?*

To boil water, bring it to a rolling boil for at least one minute. Only boil as much water as you can safely lift without spilling. Put the pot on the back burner. Be careful of scalding hazards.

### *What special precautions should people with a weakened immune system take?*

If a student has a weakened immune system, they should consult their doctor for advice.

### *Is bottled water or water from self-serve water dispensers safe to use?*

Sometimes you can use bottled water, but it depends on when and how the water was bottled. Bottling plants and/or water dispensers that use local water must treat the water to remove harmful germs. Check with the Environmental Public Health Office (phone numbers below) about bottled water brands or water dispensers that have been treated so the water is safe. You can also use water bottled from another public water supply not affected by the advisory.

### *Is the water safe to drink or cook with if an on-site water filtration device is used?*

If you have a water filtration device, **do not** use the water during a boil water advisory. Many filtration devices do not remove harmful germs. Check with the manufacturer to find out what your filtration device removes.

## GENERAL HYGIENE DURING A BOIL WATER ADVISORY

### *Can tap water be used for handwashing?*

During a boil water advisory, you can use the water to wash your hands. Wash your hands with tap water and soap, making sure to lather for at least 20 seconds. Rinse your hands well with running water, and dry them with a paper towel. After you dry your hands, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

### *Can tap water be used for showering?*

Healthy individuals may take showers with untreated tap water, if they are careful not to swallow any tap water. Younger children (elementary school age) should not use the water for showering unless properly instructed and supervised. People with open wounds, cuts, blisters or recent surgical wounds should not use the water for showering, unless measures are in place to prevent exposure to wound areas (such as covering the wound with a waterproof covering).

### *Can tap water be used for brushing teeth?*

During a boil water advisory, **do not** use tap water to brush your teeth. Use boiled water that is cooled, bottled water or water from another safe source.

### *Can tap water be used for washing laundry?*

During a boil water advisory, you can continue washing laundry like normal. Ensure that a mechanical dryer (hot drying method) is used to completely dry the material.

### *Can tap water be used for general cleaning purposes?*

The water supply can be used for general cleaning of contact surfaces such as walls and floors using regular cleaning and disinfection practices.

### *Is the water safe to fill water play areas for children?*

Water table play during a boil water advisory is discouraged. However, the following process will disinfect the water for safe play. Use water that has been previously boiled and cooled, or disinfect the water in a water play table by adding 45 ml (about 1.5 oz) of liquid household bleach to every 45 litres of water. Mix and let stand for at least 20 minutes prior to use.

## **PREPARING FOOD DURING A BOIL WATER ADVISORY**

### *Can tap water be used to make coffee?*

During a boil water advisory, you can use your coffeemaker if it heats water to **70°C** or hotter. Test the coffee temperature with a probe thermometer. Let the coffee sit in the pot for at least five minutes before you drink it. If your coffee maker does not heat the water to at least 70°C, use bottled or boiled water to make coffee.

### *Can tap water be used to wash dishes by hand?*

During a boil water advisory, wash and rinse dishes with hot tap water. After the dishes are washed and rinsed, sanitize the dishes to reduce the amount of germs to a safe level. To do this, soak your dishes for at least two minutes in a bleach solution. To make a bleach solution, mix 10 mL (2 tsp) of liquid, unscented bleach (5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite) in 5 litres (20 cups) of warm water. Let the dishes air-dry completely.

### *Can domestic dishwashers be used?*

You can use your dishwasher if it works well and has a hot temperature setting or sanitizer cycle. If your dishwasher does not have a hot temperature setting, it is recommended to stop the dishwasher at the start of the rinse cycle, add 4 teaspoons of liquid household bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite), and then re-start the dishwasher. Let the dishes dry completely, preferably using a heated dry cycle on the dishwasher.

### *How should counter tops, cutting boards or other kitchen surfaces be sanitized?*

Wash kitchen surfaces with soap, then rinse and sanitize with a bleach solution. Make a new bleach solution every day (this is because bleach breaks down quickly once it is mixed with water), so it works well to kill germs.

To prepare the sanitizer solution (sanitizer strength of 200 mg/L chlorine solution), add one teaspoon of liquid household bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite) to one litre of room temperature water that has either been previously boiled, is from a bottled water source or hauled from a safe public supply. Spray or pour this solution onto the food contact surfaces and let sit for a minimum of two minutes. Vinegar is not an acceptable disinfectant.

### *Is there further information on safe food preparation in a public food establishment?*

Follow the procedures listed in the document, “How to Use Water Safely in Your Food Establishment During A Boil Water Advisory”. This document is available on the Alberta Health Services website or by contacting your local Public Health Inspector.

## PROCEDURES TO TAKE AFTER A BOIL WATER ADVISORY IS ENDED

- Flush all water-using fixtures by running the tap for five minutes. If your service connection is long or complex, consider flushing for a longer period of time.
- For multi-storey schools, maintenance staff can flush taps starting on the upper storey by turning on each faucet for five minutes. Once every faucet on the entire floor has been flushed for five minutes, proceed to the next floor, and continue the procedure until the fixtures and faucets on all floors are flushed.
- Ensure equipment with water line connections such as refrigerator water and ice dispensers are drained, flushed, cleaned and disinfected according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Flush, drain, clean and disinfect cisterns that contained the affected water source.
- Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle according to manufacturer's recommendations.
- Drain and refill hot water heaters that have been set below 45°C/110°F.

***For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health office.***

*Edmonton Main Office  
Calgary Main Office  
Lethbridge Main Office*

*780-735-1800  
403-943-2295  
403-388-6689*

*Grande Prairie Main Office  
Red Deer Main Office  
[www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph.asp](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph.asp)*

*780-513-7517  
403-356-6366*

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# CAUTION !



**Boil Water Advisory in effect.  
This water is not safe for drinking.**

Contact **Environmental Public Health** for more information.

Edmonton and Area Ph: 780-735-1800

Calgary and Area Ph: 1-855-943-2288

Southern Alberta Ph: 403-388-6689

Northern Alberta Ph: 780-513-7517

Central Alberta Ph: 1-877-360-6366

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Boil Water Advisory in effect.

# WASH YOUR HANDS

Apply hand sanitizer after handwashing.

