

New York State Department of Health

Commonly Asked Questions Regarding Boil Water Orders:

- 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 & parasites. Bring water to full ROLLING boil for at least 1 minute to kill most infectious organisms.

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

Based on the current conditions of the affected public water supplies, vigorous hand washing with soap & tap water is safe for basic personal hygiene. If you are washing your hands & preparing food you should use boiled (then cooled) water 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 diluted bleach (1 tablespoon per gallon of water). Allow dishes to completely air dry.

-Yes, if you clean your dishes in a home dishwasher using the hot wash (170 degrees) and dry cycles. Note that not all dishwashers reach this temperature. Again, allow dishes to completely dry.

-Yes, for commercial dishwashers if you use a NSF listed washer manufactured with either a hot wash (170 degrees) or a disinfectant rinse.

-It is safe to wash clothes in tap water.

- 4.) Is potentially contaminated water safe for bathing & shaving?

The water may be used for showering, baths, shaving & washing; so long as care is taken not to swallow water. Children & disabled individuals should have their bathing 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 suffering from chronic illness may want to consider using bottled or boiled water for cleansing until the advisory is lifted.

- 5.) How should I wash fruit, vegetables & make ice?

Fruit & vegetables should be washed with boiled (then cooled water) or bottled water. Ice should be made with boiled water or bottled water.

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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 of the gastroenteritis, 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 ingested water. The major organisms of concern are protozoa such as Giardia & Cryptosporidium, & bacteria such as Shigella E. coli & viruses. These organisms primarily affect the gastrointestinal system, causing diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, & 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.