

# *Boil Water Advisory*

## For Manitoba Water System Users

### What to do when you're advised to boil your water

Boil water advisories are issued when a municipal, community or local water supply is at risk of microbial contamination. Advisories are issued by a Medical Officer of Health and water use instructions should be followed until you are told the risk of contamination is over.

Boiling your drinking water will kill microorganisms (bacteria, viruses, protozoa) that could cause illness.

Most advisories are only for tap water used as drinking water – the water can still be used for bathing, showering, laundry and washing dishes.

When a boil water advisory is issued for the water supply in your area, you will receive a public notice. It will state the reason for the advisory and any special instructions you need to follow.

The boil water advisory instructions apply even if you have a water treatment device in your house. These devices may not kill or remove microorganisms that are in your water supply.

### Boil water advisory for drinking water only

Tap water should be brought to a rolling boil for one minute and then stored in clean containers. A container of boiled water may be stored in the refrigerator to keep it cold.

Once the water has been boiled, it is safe to use for:

- drinking
- making infant formula and juice
- cooking
- making ice
- washing fruits and vegetables
- brushing teeth and soaking false teeth
- feeding pets

When boiling water, care must be taken to avoid burns and scalding. Place kettles and pots on back burners and away from counter edges. Kettles with an automatic shut-off feature may not boil the water for one full minute.

If you are boiling water in a microwave, put a glass rod, wooden or plastic microwave-safe stick (never metal) in the container so you do not super heat the water.

Get rid of all ice, infant formula, juice, drink mixes, etc. that were made before the boil water advisory was issued.

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Use usual precautions for infants under 6 months, (ex: sterilize bottles in boiling water).

An alternative to boiling water is to use water from a known safe source (ex: bottled water). Be aware that the advisory may also apply to local water bottlers or haulers if they are using the same water source.

Postpone home canning, beer and wine-making until the boil water advisory has been lifted.

You can use tap water for washing hands, dishes and laundry. Follow normal precautions when washing hands and dishes. Wash hands properly, rubbing all parts of the hand with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Dishes should be air dried and not wiped.

Adults and teens can shower or bath as long as they don't swallow any water. Older children can be given a shower with a hand-held showerhead, avoiding the face. Younger children should be sponge-bathed only, because they are most likely to swallow tub or shower water.

Share information related to the advisory with other people who use the tap water, especially those who may not have received the boil water advisory notice directly (ex: tenants, staff or clients).

## Additional precautions for high risk situations or immune-compromised persons

If the risk of contamination is more severe, the advisory will state clearly that the boil water applies to all domestic uses of tap water. (See Boil Water Advisory Fact Sheet #4 "Boil Water Advisory - For All Domestic Water Uses").

Anyone who has a weakened immune system (ex: cancer patient, someone taking immune suppressing medication, etc.) should contact their doctor or public health professionals for advice. Some of the additional precautions listed under Boil Water Advisory Fact Sheet #4 "Boil Water Advisory - For All Domestic Water Uses" may be recommended.

## Long-term advisories

Water systems may remain on boil water advisory for an extended period of time if they do not have treatment equipment to reduce the risk of microbiological contamination. Water use instructions should be followed until adequate treatment is provided and you are told the risk of contamination is over.

Consuming water from a poorly treated water supply can lead to gastrointestinal-related symptoms, such as diarrhea and nausea. If you are experiencing on-going gastrointestinal-related symptoms or are under the care of a physician, please discuss water use with your physician as you may need to take added precautions.

Infrastructure upgrades may be costly and require lengthy planning. Contact the water system owner for information on the steps being taken to address the advisory and when they expect the advisory to be lifted.

## Private well owners

Private well owners are responsible for testing and assessing the risk to their own well. Please see Boil Water Advisory Fact Sheet #2 "For Private Well Owners" if bacteria test results indicate your well water is not safe to drink, or if you have been advised to boil your well water for any reason.

## Commercial or public facilities

Owners of commercial or public facilities, such as restaurants, schools, daycares, hospitals, and water bottling or food processing facilities, are legally responsible for ensuring the water they provide to the public is safe for its intended use. Additional precautions apply during and after a boil water advisory. Please see “Boil Water Advisory Fact Sheet #3 For Commercial/Public Facilities” and talk to your local Public Health Inspector for more information.

## When a boil water advisory is lifted

When the safety of your water supply is confirmed, the boil water advisory will be lifted and you will be told you can use the tap water again. In most instances, normal water use can continue as usual immediately following the lifting of the advisory.

In some cases, additional steps may be required before returning to normal water use. These additional steps would typically be needed only if there has been widespread contamination throughout the distribution system or disease outbreaks attributed to the water supply. Homeowners can also take these steps if they

notice water quality concerns following an advisory. In these cases, normal water use should resume only after completing the following steps:

- Flush out your household water pipes to ensure they contain safe water before using them. To do this:
  - > Turn on one hot water tap and let it run until the water is cold. This will drain the hot water heater and refill it with safe water.
  - > Then, turn on all your cold water taps, faucets, fountains, showerheads and outside hose spigots and let them run for five minutes.
- Remove and clean all screens on taps and faucets.
- Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle.
- Replace any water filter cartridges in water treatment devices and follow the maintenance instructions in the owner’s manual.

## For more information

Other boil water advisory factsheets are available on the internet at: [www.gov.mb.ca/waterstewardship/drinking\\_water/boil\\_water\\_advisory\\_factsheet.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/waterstewardship/drinking_water/boil_water_advisory_factsheet.html)

For more information on drinking water safety, water treatment devices or to receive a copy of other drinking water fact sheets, please visit the Office of Drinking Water website at [www.manitoba.ca/drinkingwater](http://www.manitoba.ca/drinkingwater) or

contact 204-945-5762. To locate a local office near you, please refer to the website at [www.manitoba.ca/waterstewardship/odw/reg-contacts/index.html](http://www.manitoba.ca/waterstewardship/odw/reg-contacts/index.html).

For health information, contact Health Links at 204-788-8200 in Winnipeg; toll free at 1-888-315-9257 or contact your local public health office. To find your nearest office, go to: [www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html](http://www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html).