



Public Utilities Department

Boil Water Advisory Frequently Asked Questions

Why is a Boil Water Advisory issued, and how long will it last?

The State Water Resources Control Board, Division of Drinking Water, in conjunction with the local water agency and county health department, issues a Boil Water Advisory when there is concern about potential bacterial contamination to the water supply. The State Water Resources Control Board with the assistance of the water agency develops a plan to eliminate any potential source of contamination and a testing plan to verify the water system is safe to drink. The testing plan typically requires 48 to 72 hours to complete. When tests demonstrate there is no longer a concern for public health, the State Water Resources Control Board ends the Boil Water Advisory. The Boil Water Advisory can last longer than 72 hours if tests show potential further contamination.

What should I do if I have already consumed some of the water?

If you think you may have consumed some of the water, prior to notification, watch for gastrointestinal symptoms such as diarrhea and vomiting. If you do experience these symptoms, it is recommended you see your doctor or physician immediately to determine the source of the symptoms. (County of San Diego Public Health)

How long should I let the water boil?

To appropriately boil water, customers should bring the water to a boil, let it boil for at least one minute, and then let cool before using.

Can we use the water to wash and bathe?

The Boil Water Advisory prohibits drinking or cooking unless the water is boiled first. Taking showers, bathing and washing hands, laundry and dishes are permitted. Adults, teens and older children can wash, bathe or shower; however, they should avoid swallowing the water. Toddlers and infants should be sponge bathed.

Do I have to boil the water if I have a reverse osmosis system?

Reverse osmosis is not designed for removing bacterial contamination. Therefore, boiling water is still required.

I own a restaurant, what should I do?

The Food and Housing Division of the County of San Diego Department of Environmental Health will respond to food facility related calls at (858) 505-6900.

Is it necessary to boil all water in the home during an advisory or order?

During Boil Water Advisories you should boil all water used for drinking, preparing food, beverages, ice cubes, washing fruits and vegetables, or brushing teeth. It is not necessary to boil tap water used for other household purposes, such as showering, laundry or bathing.

What should I do in my home?

- Discard any water stored before the Boil Water Advisory.
- Bring water to a rolling boil for one minute, cool it and store in a clean, covered container.
- If water is visibly cloudy, bring water to a rolling boil for three minutes.
- Bottled water and distilled water from approved sources may be used instead.
- Use boiled or bottled water for drinking, cooking, cleaning fruits and vegetables, brushing teeth and for coffee and ice machines.
- Household pets should also be given boiled or bottled water to drink.
- To wash dishes by hand or clean countertops, use hot, soapy water then rinse with cooled, boiled water.
- Use the regular or sani-cycle on the dishwasher. The energy saving cycle won't get water hot enough to kill parasites/bacteria.
- Laundry may be done as usual.
- Hot tubs and whirlpools maintained according to manufactures guidelines, including chlorine, bromine or ozone levels, are safe to use. Do not swallow any water if using them.

What is not safe?

- Coffee machines don't get water hot enough for long enough.
- Freezing water (ice machines, ice cubes) doesn't kill organisms that may be present.
- When bathing/showering, do not swallow any water.
- When bathing children, do not let them chew on washcloths or toys used in the bath. Toys in the bath may hold water in them. Clean the toys by putting them through the dishwasher.

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