

Frequently Asked Questions During and After a Water Advisory

In most situations, homeowners will find themselves with a Boil Water Advisory (BWA), therefore this document will primarily address BWA situations.

General Information about a Boil Water Advisory

A Boil Water Advisory is typically issued after a water main break repair, small or widespread loss of pressure in our water system, or a natural disaster. In most cases, our crews can repair a water main while maintaining adequate pressure to prevent contamination from entering the water distribution system. When we issue a Boil Water Advisory, we notify only the customers affected.

Protecting your family, yourself, and others from potentially contaminated drinking water takes some thought and effort. Questions from residents and homeowners about how to do this often arise during a boil water event. The following provides answers to common questions you may have.

Frequently Asked Questions During a Boil Water Advisory

General

Use Tap Water for:

- Washing clothes (unless the water is cloudy)
- Taking showers (for adults and older children if care is taken not to swallow and avoid shaving nicks)
- Flushing Toilet

Use Boiled Water for:

- Drinking
- Brushing teeth
- Washing fruits and vegetables
- Preparing food
- Mixing baby formula
- Making ice
- Giving water to pets

Use Caution:

- Most kitchen and other household water filters do not remove bacteria or viruses
- Coffee makers, vending machines, and soda dispensers with a line to the water supply
- Bathing babies and young children (give sponge bath; use boiled water that has cooled)

How do I boil my water during an advisory?

- Fill a pot with water.
- Heat the water until bubbles come from the bottom of the pot to the top.
- Once the water reaches a rolling boil, let it boil for 1 minute.

Homeowners

- Turn off the heat source and let the water cool.
- Pour water into a clean container with a cover for storage

Why do I have to boil my water?

Your water may be contaminated due to a recent water main break in the system. The Boil Water Advisory gives you information so you can take action to protect your health.

How long will the need to boil water continue?

Public notification will be given when the boil water notice is lifted. The Athens-Clarke County (ACC) Public Utilities Department will also give you details on how long your boil water notice might last and will advise you when it is safe to return to normal water use.

Typically a boil water event lasts for 24 to 48 hours, but this can be longer and the need to boil water may last for several days or more. How long depends on the conditions that caused the need to boil, how quickly the conditions can be corrected, and how long it takes for laboratory results to confirm that your water is again ready to drink.

Should I use bottled water?

You may choose to use bottled water if it is available.

Food and Beverages

Can I use my coffee maker, ice machine, or water or soda dispenser?

Do not use water from any appliance connected to your water lines. This includes the water and ice dispensers in your refrigerator/freezer. Most kitchen and other household water filters typically do not remove or kill all bacteria or viruses.

- Use boiled or bottled water to make coffee and ice.
- Most kitchen and other household water filters typically do not remove or kill all bacteria or viruses.
- When the boil water advisory is lifted, consult the owner's manual to find out how to sanitize appliances.

What if I have a water pitcher/dispenser with a filter?

Most of these units are not capable of removing pathogens, including viruses, bacteria, and protozoa. The few that are designed to do so may still require disinfection to address viruses and must be properly operated and diligently maintained to ensure effective treatment. It is recommended that you use boiled (and then cooled) water or an alternate source such as bottled water.

Can I use ice from my refrigerator/freezer ?

- Do not use ice from ice trays, ice dispensers, or ice makers.
- Throw out all ice made with tap water.
- Make new ice with boiled or bottled water.

What should I do about preparing food and beverages? How should I wash fruit, vegetables, and food preparation surfaces?

- Wash fruits and vegetables with boiled water that has cooled or bottled water.
- Bring water to a rolling boil for 1 minute before adding food to cook.
- Use boiled water when preparing drinks, such as coffee, tea, and lemonade.
- Wash food preparation surfaces with boiled water.

Homeowners

What should I do about feeding my baby?

Breastfeeding is best. Continue to breastfeed. If breastfeeding is not an option:

- Use ready-to-use baby formula, if possible.
- Prepare powdered or concentrated baby formula with bottled water. Use boiled water if you do not have bottled water. Disinfect water for baby formula if you cannot boil your water (see above for directions on how to use bleach to disinfect water).
- Wash and sterilize bottles and nipples before use.
- If you cannot sterilize bottles, try to use single-serve, ready-to-feed bottles.

How do I wash dishes during a Boil Water Advisory?

Household dishwashers generally are safe to use if the water reaches a final rinse temperature of at least 150°F or if the dishwasher has a sanitizing cycle.

Hygiene

Can I use tap water to brush my teeth?

No. Do not use untreated tap water to brush your teeth. Any water you ingest or place in your mouth should be disinfected by boiling (and then cooled) or come from an alternate source. Bottled water is excellent for brushing your teeth.

Is it safe to take a shower or bath?

Unless a "Do Not Use" notification has been issued, your 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.

Use caution when bathing babies and young children. Consider giving them a sponge bath to reduce the chance of them swallowing water.

To minimize the chance of infections, 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 alternate source.

Health

I already drank the water. Will I get sick?

Most people who happen to drink this water will not get sick.

If you do get sick, the symptoms are similar to food poisoning: nausea, diarrhea, cramps, and possibly a mild fever. These symptoms are not unique to exposure to potential contaminants/organisms in the water, and a doctor's involvement is key to identifying the cause of your illness. If your doctor suspects a waterborne illness, you may be asked to provide blood and/or stool samples.

Household Information

Should I give my pets boiled water?

Pets can get some of the same diseases as people. It is a good idea to give them boiled water that has been cooled.

Do I need to worry about my fish or aquatic pets (e.g., reptiles, frogs)?

Most germs that infect people do not infect reptiles or fish. If your water system is using more chlorine or changing disinfection, be cautious about changing the water in your fish tank or aquarium. Contact your local pet store or veterinarian for more advice.

Is it safe to water my garden and house plants?

Homeowners

You can use tap water for household plants and gardens.

What about doing laundry?

Yes, unless a "Do Not Use" notification has been issued, it is safe to wash clothes in tap water as long as the clothes are completely dried before being worn. However, increased turbidity that sometimes occurs during a boil water event may discolor clothing, especially whites.

Where can I get more information?

- Personal Preparation and Storage of Safe Water: CDC provides guidance on the amount of water needed for good health, as well as how to prepare and store safe water before and during an emergency.
- [Hygiene and Handwashing:](#) CDC provides guidance on alternative hygienic practices when water is not available or is contaminated.
- [A Guide to Water Filters:](#) CDC maintains a guide for filters that remove Cryptosporidium or Giardia.
- EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline: 1-800-426-4791

Consumer Information: EPA provides information and guidance about drinking water quality, emergencies, contaminants, public health issues, and treatment and storage.

Additional Considerations

- All employees with diarrheal illness should be regulated by standard rules of exclusion from work.
- Monitor patients closely for signs and symptoms of gastrointestinal illness.
- Since few dialysis facilities pipe water treated to AMMI standards to their sinks, fountains, hot water tanks, etc., the same precautions appropriate for other medical facilities should be taken to control potential exposures at these locations for patients, the public and staff.

For more information, contact:

Athens-Clarke County Public Utilities Department, 706-613-3481

Get updates at www.accgov.com/publicutilities

Clarke County Health Department, 706-369-5816