



Iowa Department of Public Health Division of Environmental Health

Frequently Asked Questions About Boil Water Advisories (Residential)

Why do I need to boil my water?

During a "boil water advisory", tap water is not safe for drinking and must be boiled. Boiling kills bacteria and other organisms in the water.

How can I make my water safe?

During a boil advisory, you may use tap water for consumption but you must bring the water to a rolling boil for one minute, and then cool before using. After boiling the water it should be stored in clean plastic containers and water coolers made of heavy opaque plastic with tight fitting screw lids. Avoid the use of used milk jugs, juice containers, sports bottles, etc. You should use bottled water when available.

When should I use boiled tap water or bottled water?

Boiled tap water or bottled water should be used for drinking, making ice, brushing teeth, washing fruits and vegetables, baby formula, coffee, and food preparation until further notice. It is also recommended that you wash your hands using soap and either bottled water or boiled tap water.

Can my family take showers or baths with tap water?

The water may be used for showers and bathing as long as no water is swallowed. It is recommended that children be given a sponge bath using bottled water or water that has been boiled. People with open wounds or who are immune-compromised should avoid showering or bathing in contaminated tap water.

Can I wash dishes using tap water?

Dishes and utensils should be washed using bottled water or water that has been boiled.

Can I give my pet tap water?

Pets are not normally affected by the same diseases as humans, however giving pets bottled water or boiled tap water is suggested.

What if I operate a restaurant?

When a "boil water order" is issued by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals (DIA) requires that precautions be taken by all food service establishments in the affected areas. For more information about the operation of food service establishments during a water boil order, please contact DIA's Food and Consumer Safety Bureau at (515) 281-6538.

Other questions?

General guidelines on ways to lessen the risk of infection by bacteria or other organisms are available from the EPA Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 1(800) 426-4791.

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