

# *F a c t s*

---

## **BOIL WATER ORDER (BWO)**

---

### **How to use water safely during a “boil water order”**

#### **What are the reasons for “boil water order”?**

There are different reasons for issuing a Boil Water Order.

1. **Bacteriological (microbial) contamination**, including the finding of bacteria or parasites.
2. **Information other than bacteriological contamination** indicating that the water is not safe to drink. (e.g., the lack or absence of disinfection residual in the drinking water).
3. **Outbreak of illness** in the community that has been linked to consumption of the water.

**The extent of restriction on water use depends on the situation and the reason for issuing a Boil Water Order. Always follow the health unit’s recommendations on water use.**

### **How do I use water when the Boil Water Order has been issued?**

The water should **NOT** be used for **drinking, making infant formula and juices, cooking (heating soup etc.), making ice, washing fruits, vegetables or brushing teeth.** For these purposes, boiled water or bottled water should be used. The water should be brought to a rapid rolling boil and maintained at a boil for 1 minute. Discard all ice made previously and disinfect the ice cube trays. *Make ice using boiled, cooled water.*

### **What is disinfection?**

Disinfection is a cleaning process which destroys most disease-causing micro-organisms (pathogens).

# — *Health & Environment Facts* —

## **Can I take a bath?**

Fine to shower or bath. Avoid contact of with eyes, mouth, ears or open sores.  
NB: to supervise young children.

## **Can I use the water for hand washing?**

*If the boil water order has been issued as a precaution and there is no outbreak of human illness, there is no need for additional hand disinfection with bleach solution or alcohol using the measures described below.*

## **How else can I disinfect my hands?**

You can use alcohol-based hand sanitizer, containing more than 60% alcohol. These products are widely used in the health care setting after washing hands or in situations when water is not available. Hands must be completely dry before applying alcohol-based hand disinfection. Wet wipes used for cleaning babies at diaper change are not effective for disinfecting hands and should not be used for this purpose.

## **My child was ill with diarrhea. Should I clean/disinfect toys?**

Yes, toys should be cleaned and disinfected. If the toys are visibly soiled, wash them first with soap and water and then disinfect with a freshly prepared bleach solution (1/4 cup (about 60ml) bleach with 1 gallon (4.5 litres) of water. (Solution of 600 ppm chlorine). Dip toys into this solution and air-dry them. Cloth and plush toys could be washed, dry-cleaned or dishwasher.

## **I have a dishwasher. Is it safe to use?**

Your domestic dishwasher may not adequately disinfect the dishes. To ensure dishes are disinfected, soak dishes for 1 minute in a solution of 1 oz. (30ml) of bleach mixed with 3 gallons of lukewarm water (13.5 litres). (100 ppm chlorine solution).

# **— Health & Environment Facts —**

## **I wash dishes by hand. How do I disinfect them?**

You could use boiled water for washing dishes. Mix 1 oz. (about 30 ml) bleach with 3 gallons (13.5 litres) of lukewarm water (100 ppm solution of chlorine) and completely immerse for at least 1 minute. Let dishes air dry.

## **How do I disinfect countertops, chopping boards or utensils which have come into contact with raw meat?**

Countertops, chopping boards or utensils which have come into contact with raw meat should be washed with soap and hot water first, and then disinfected with a bleach. Mix 1 oz. (about 30 ml) bleach with 1 gallon (4.5 litres) water for this purpose. This is a solution of 200 ppm. Allow contact time of the the solution on the surface of what you are disinfecting. Do not reuse or store this solution, but make it fresh daily.

## **Should I change the way I am doing laundry?**

No, continue doing laundry the way you usually do. If you have to launder sheets heavily soiled with feces, carefully remove fecal matter without much agitation of the cloth before you place the sheets into the washer. Use gloves when handling heavily soiled sheets.

## **Is the water safe to fill wading pools for children?**

No, the water is not safe to use in wading pools unless the pool water is adequately disinfected. Recommended disinfection would be 1 oz. of 5.25% chlorine per 50 gallons of water. Dump and fill daily.

## **I have a water filtration device installed. Does this make the water safe for drinking or cooking?**

No. Filtered water should also be brought to a rapid rolling boil for 1 minute before drinking or using it for cooking.

# **— Health & Environment Facts —**

## **My doctor told me I am immunocompromised. What should I do?**

Always follow your physician, dietician and Health Unit advice.

## **How does the medical officer of health decide when to “lift” a boil water order?**

The water should continue to be boiled until the objectives are no longer exceeded in two consecutive sets of samples taken from all parts of the distribution system that has been affected. The objectives address issues that can affect health, such as the presence of E. coli.

## **What should I do after the boil water order is lifted?**

Run cold water faucets for 1 minute before using the water. Run drinking fountains for 1 minute before using the water. Flush all garden hoses by running cold water through them for 1 minute. Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle. Drain and refill hot water heaters set below 45<sup>0</sup> C, (normal setting is 60<sup>0</sup>C).

**Adapted from Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, “Water Safety Health Facts Sheet.”**