

# Boil Water Notices: Common Questions & Answers

## Water for Drinking and Cooking during Boil Water Notices

Safe drinking water includes bottled, boiled or treated water. Here are some general rules about water for drinking and cooking.

- >> Do not use un-boiled tap water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food or make ice.
- >> If you use bottled water, know where it came from. Otherwise, water should be boiled or treated before use. Drink only bottled, boiled or treated water until your supply is tested and you are told it is safe.
- >> Rinse containers for disinfected water with a bleach solution before reusing them (one tablespoon bleach per gallon of water). Use water storage tanks and other types of containers with caution. For example, fire truck storage tanks and used cans or bottles may be contaminated with germs or chemicals. Do not use containers for disinfection unless you know they are germ-free.

## Q What is the proper way to disinfect my water so that it is safe to drink?

A The best way to treat tap water is by boiling. Boiling water kills harmful germs (freezing will not disinfect water). Bring water to a full rolling boil for at least one minute to kill most harmful germs. If you don't have power, disinfect the tap water by adding 8 drops (about 1/8 teaspoon) of plain unscented household bleach (4 to 6%) to a gallon of water and let it stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy, repeat the these steps. Use a container that has a cap or cover for disinfecting and storing water to be used for drinking. This will prevent contamination. If your well was flooded, boiling the water is the safest action, since disinfection does not kill certain germs.

## Q How should I wash my hands during a Boil Water Notice period?

A Carefully washing your hands with antibacterial soap and your tap water is safe for basic personal hygiene. If you are washing your hands to prepare food, you should use boiled (then cooled) water, disinfected or bottled water with hand washing soap.

## Q Is my tap water safe for washing dishes or clothes?

A Yes, if you rinse hand-washed dishes for one minute in a bleach solution (1 tablespoon bleach per gallon of water). Allow dishes to completely air dry. Most household dishwashers do not reach high enough temperatures to sanitize dishes. It is safe to wash clothes in tap water.

**Q Is tap water safe for bathing and shaving?**

**A** The water may be used for showering, baths, shaving and washing, as long as you are careful not to swallow the water or get water in the eyes or nose or mouth. Children and disabled people should be carefully watched to make sure they do not swallow any water. Baths and showers should be as short as possible. People with recent surgical wounds, immunity problems, or chronic illnesses (such as diabetes, lupus, etc.) may want to use bottled or boiled water for bathing until the Boil Water Notice is lifted.

**Q How should I wash fruit and vegetables and make ice?**

**A** Fruits and vegetables should be washed with boiled (then cooled) water or bottled water or water disinfected with 8 drops (about 1/8 teaspoon) of unscented household bleach per gallon of water. Ice should be made with boiled water, bottled water or disinfected water. (Do not use ice from your refrigerator's automatic ice maker during the Boil Water Notice period.)

**Q What if I already drank my tap water?**

**A** Even if someone has consumed water that may be contaminated from either a public water system or a private well before they were aware of the Boil Water Notice, the chances of becoming ill are low. Anyone with

symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, or abdominal cramps (with or without fever), should see a doctor.

**Q What germs might be in my tap water during the Boil Water Notice period?**

**A** Drinking contaminated water is the way most people get sick if they get sick at all. The major germs are protozoa such as Giardia and Cryptosporidium, and bacteria, such as Shigella, *E. coli* and viruses. These organisms usually affect the gastrointestinal system, causing diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting with or without fever. Most of these illnesses are not usually serious or life-threatening except in the elderly, the very young or those who are immunocompromised.

**Q How will I know when the Boil Water Notice is over and I can safely use my tap water?**

**A** You will be told by the FGUA when it is safe to use your tap water. We usually let you know with a door hanger at your home. In certain situations, you may also hear information about the Boil Water Notice on the radio, television or in the newspaper. Your local county health department usually has information on whether the Boil Water Notice is lifted as well. You can always call your FGUA office for the latest information.

*This fact sheet was based on information from the Florida Department of Health. For more information on health and safety issues during Boil Water Notice periods or other emergency situations, visit these web sites or call these agencies.*

**Florida Department of Health**

(850) 245-4444

[www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/water/index.html](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/water/index.html)

**Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection**

(850) 245-8624

[www.dep.state.fl.us/water/drinkingwater/index.htm](http://www.dep.state.fl.us/water/drinkingwater/index.htm)

**Local County Health Department**

Check your local phone book, county government pages  
[www.doh.state.fl.us/chdsitelist.htm](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/chdsitelist.htm)