

# How to Use Water Safely in Personal Service Facilities During a Boil Water Advisory

## *What is a boil water advisory?*

A boil water advisory is a notification that the drinking water supply may be contaminated with pathogenic microorganisms (e.g., *E.coli* bacteria, *Giardia* parasite), and use of the tap water can make people sick. Boiling the tap water destroys pathogens and makes the water safe to drink and use.

## *What are the risks and can a personal service facility operate during a boil water advisory?*

When a boil water advisory event occurs, there is a potential for exposure to pathogenic organisms from direct consumption, invasive procedures, and skin contact. Having running potable water is a regulatory requirement in order for a personal service facility to operate. Potable water is required for hand hygiene, instrument reprocessing, and use in several personal service procedures. The personal service facility may be allowed to operate during a boil water advisory using alternate water sources, as long as the facility can demonstrate safe operation in a manner that does not pose a risk to public health. If the personal service facility is unable to operate in a safe manner during a boil water advisory, the facility must cease operation.

## *What immediate steps must a personal service facility implement when a boil water advisory is issued?*

- Contact your local Environmental Public Health Office (phone numbers below) to determine if it is safe for you to operate. You may need to arrange for an inspection to be completed prior to operating to determine if procedures can be offered in a safe manner.
- Signs should be posted at the entrance to the facility and at all faucets, including washrooms, handsinks, equipment reprocessing areas, and staff lunch rooms as a reminder that a boil water advisory is in effect and that the water is not safe to drink or use. See attached signs.
- Provide an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, containing at least 60% alcohol, in all public and staff washrooms, and at all stand-alone hand hygiene sinks. Non-alcohol hand sanitizers are not acceptable.
- Staff are expected to wash hands at the usual frequency. However, during a boil water advisory hand washing must be followed by the application of alcohol based hand sanitizer. As an extra precaution, single-use disposable gloves may also be used after the application of hand sanitizer.
- Advise clients and staff not to use tap water for drinking. Provide a safe alternate source of water for drinking if applicable.

- Disconnect or turn off the tap water supply to all appliances, tanks, and equipment, excluding laundry machines. If the equipment cannot be used without being connected to the tap water supply, the procedure must be suspended (i.e. Colonic irrigation).
- Use a safe alternate water source in place of tap water for all client procedures, treatments, instrument cleaning, washing broken skin, and for the preparation of any solutions.
- Empty any solutions, wash bottles or disinfectants that may have been prepared with potentially contaminated water. The vessels should be cleaned, rinsed (with water from a safe alternate source) and dried before being refilled.

***What are safe alternate water sources during a boil water advisory?***

- Sterile water (for invasive procedures)
- Distilled water
- Water that has been boiled (rolling boil) for one full minute and then cooled to room temperature (for invasive procedures)
- Water from another approved public supply not affected by the advisory
- Commercially bottled water produced in locations that are not affected by the boil water advisory

***What can't tap water be used for in a personal service facility during a boil water advisory?***

**Do not** use the tap water (unless properly boiled first) for:

- Drinking
- Diluting tattoo ink
- Rinsing tattoo needles between color changes
- Washing the skin
- Mixing oral rinse solutions
- Contact within body cavities (i.e. colonic irrigation)
- Facility prepared solutions and disinfectants
- Diluting floatation tanks
- Filling pedicure basins and manicure soak

***What is the correct way to boil water?***

Boiling the tap water will destroy any pathogens that might be present, and it will make the water safe to drink and use. To correctly boil water, bring it to a rolling boil for at least one minute.

***Is water from self-serve water dispensers safe to use?***

In most instances, bottled water used in self-serve water dispensers is safe to use, but it depends on when and how the water was bottled. Bottling plants and water dispensers that operate in the municipality affected by the boil water advisory must treat the water to ensure that harmful microorganisms are removed. Check with the Environmental Public Health Office about sources of water that are considered to be safe.

***Do water filtration devices make the tap water safe to use on clients?***

Not necessarily. Many water filtration devices do not remove pathogens. If the water passes through a water filtration device in your facility, **do not** use this water unless it has been boiled first.

## **INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL DURING A BOIL WATER ADVISORY**

***Can tap water be used to wash hands when performing client services?***

Yes, tap water can be used for handwashing but an alcohol-based hand sanitizer must be applied afterwards. Wash your hands with warm tap water and soap, making sure to lather for at least 20 seconds. Rinse your hands well under running water, and dry them with a paper towel. When hands are dry and visibly clean, apply an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.

***Can tap water be used for washing hair, showering or bathing?***

Yes. Staff may wash a client's hair, and clients may take showers or baths with tap water, but they should be advised to be careful to avoid the face, and avoid swallowing any of the water.

**Additional Considerations**

- New tattoos and piercings or any broken skin should be covered as usual, and care must be taken not to contaminate these areas.
- Tattoo and piercing facilities may need to alter their after-care instructions in the event of a community-wide boil water advisory, to caution the client against applying contaminated water to the wound.
- Pedicure basins must not be filled with tap water unless that water is from an approved source or has been boiled properly beforehand.

## **CLEANING AND DISINFECTING PRACTICES**

***Can tap water be used for cleaning and disinfecting client contact and environmental surfaces?***

Tap water can be used for general cleaning of surfaces such as walls and floors only.

All work surfaces including procedure chairs, benches, tables, trays, etc., are required to be cleaned and disinfected after each client service using solutions prepared with sterile, distilled, bottled water, water that was previously boiled, or water that came from another safe source.

To avoid confusion, ready-to-use disinfectants and disinfectant cleaners are strongly preferred.

***Can tap water be used for cleaning and disinfecting personal service tools and equipment?***

In the event of a boil water advisory, every effort should be made to use single-use and disposable tools and equipment.

For those tools that cannot be discarded after one use, tap water cannot be used for cleaning tools and equipment during a boil water advisory. Use a safe alternate potable water source to clean and rinse the tools prior to disinfection or sterilization.

### ***Can tap water be used for washing laundry?***

During a boil water advisory, tap water may still be used for general laundry procedures. Laundry should be dried in a mechanical drying machine on a normal setting or hotter.

### ***Can an autoclave be used during a boil water advisory?***

Instruments being placed into autoclaves should have already been cleaned using water that was previously boiled, bottled water or water from another safe source. Only distilled water should be used in the autoclave itself.

### ***Can personal service equipment that is directly connected to the water supply be used?***

No, however this is dependent on the equipment and should be assessed on a case by case scenario. Contact your local Environmental Public Health Office for any specific questions related to the equipment and water quality.

## **PROCEDURES TO TAKE AFTER A BOIL WATER ADVISORY IS ENDED**

- Flush all water-using fixtures and faucets by running them for five minutes. If your service connection is long or complex, consider flushing for a longer period of time.
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces and equipment that have been in contact with tap water during the boil water advisory.
- Ensure all equipment with water line connections are drained, flushed, cleaned, and disinfected according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Flush, drain, clean and disinfect cisterns that contained the affected water source.
- Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Replace the filters on any water filtration devices, and flush the fixture according to the manufacturer's directions.
- Drain and refill hot water heaters that have been set below 45°C/110°F.

***For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health office.***

Edmonton Main Office  
Calgary Main Office  
Lethbridge Main Office

780-735-1800  
403-943-2295  
403-388-6689

Grande Prairie Main Office  
Red Deer Main Office  
[www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph.asp](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/eph.asp)

780-513-7517  
403-356-6366

DW-15-002  
Created: Jul/15