

What to Do When You Get a *Boil Water Advisory Notice*

If you get a boil water notice for the water system you are on, you should boil your water. Here is why:

During an issue in a water system, there is a chance that people could get sick. Boiling the water reduces that risk.

Notices are given by water utilities or health agencies as an advisory or precaution to protect consumers from getting sick from drinking water that may have been contaminated. When boil water notices are given it is usually because something unexpected has happened in a public water system, causing a potential for contamination with disease-causing organisms (also called pathogens) which include bacteria and viruses. These can make you ill.

Common reasons for a boil water notice include loss of pressure in the distribution system, loss of disinfection, and other unexpected water quality problems. These often are due to water line breaks, treatment disruptions, power outages and floods. The reason for your boil water notice will be included in the notice. Your water utility and the New Mexico Environment Department's Drinking Water Bureau-designated staff can also answer questions you may have about why a boil water notice was issued for your water supply, and what to do.

If you get a notice, you should boil water until the advisory is lifted.

When an Advisory is Issued You Need to Boil Water For:

Drinking	YES
Cooking	YES
Washing Fruits and Vegetables	YES
Feeding a Baby* (page 2)	YES
Brushing Teeth	YES
Preparing Drinks Coffee, tea, Kool-Aid, frozen juices, protein shakes, Ensure, Lemonade, etc.	YES
Making Ice Disconnect automatic ice makers and manually make ice using water that has been boiled.	YES
House Pets * (page 2) (Drinking Water)	YES
Handwashing* For basic hygiene. For preparing food, wash hands with boiled water.	SOMETIMES
Bathing and Showering	NO
Shaving	NO
Washing Dishes* (page 4)	NO
Laundry/Washing Clothes	NO
Watering House Plants	NO



For questions about the water system and the water quality, please call NMED at 505-476-8620 or 877-654-8720.

For questions about potential health problems associated with the water, please call NMDOH at 505-827-0006.



Reduce your risk of getting sick; boil your water.

This is how to do it:

1. First, get your water from the tap, or other source. Next, look at the water. Is it cloudy/discolored? Or is it clear? If it is:

CLOUDY/DISCOLORED

- Filter it through a clean cloth, paper towel, or coffee filter OR allow it to settle.
- Draw off the clear water.
- Bring the clear water to a rolling boil (with bubbles) for at least one minute. At elevations above 6,500 feet, boil for at least three minutes.

CLEAR

- Bring the clear water to a rolling boil (with bubbles) for at least one minute. At elevations above 6,500 feet, boil for at least three minutes.

2. Turn off the heat, and let the boiled water cool.
3. Store the boiled water in clean sanitized containers with tight covers.

Now you can use this water for drinking, washing fruits and vegetables, feeding a baby, brushing teeth, preparing drinks, making ice, preparing or washing food, providing drinking water to pets, or for hand washing before preparing or eating food.

Common Health Questions

* **What should I do about feeding my baby?**

Breastfeeding is best, and if you breast-feed, keep doing it. If breastfeeding is not an option:

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

What if I already drank the water?

Most people who drink this water will not get sick. If you do get sick, the symptoms are similar to food poisoning and these symptoms would have occurred within a few days: nausea, diarrhea, cramps, and possibly a mild fever.

What should I do if I have symptoms?

The most important thing to do is avoid dehydration. Drink plenty of fluids such as bottled water or treated water from other sources. Avoid drinks with caffeine, such as soda, coffee, and tea. If you are concerned about your health or the health of a family member, contact your health care provider.

* **Can my pets drink the water?**

Pets can get some of the same diseases as people. For drinking water, it is a good idea to give them boiled water that has been cooled. Pet fish should not be exposed to water containing elevated levels of bacteria. If the organism's water needs to be refreshed use appropriately boiled or bottled water.

When boiling is not an option, then disinfect.

This is how to do it:

Our recommendation is to boil your water as a way to kill pathogens, which are the main concern. However, if boiling your water is not a possibility, another method is to disinfect it.

In an emergency, liquid chlorine bleach (use bleach that does not have an added scent, like lemon) can be used. If water is clear, add 1/8 teaspoon (8 drops or about 0.75 milliliters) of household liquid bleach to 1 gallon (16 cups) of water. Mix well and wait 30 minutes or more before drinking. If water is still cloudy or not filtered, add ¼ teaspoon of household liquid bleach to 1 gallon (16 cups) of water. Store disinfected water in clean container with a cover.

How to Store Clean Water

Once you have boiled or sanitized your water it is important to store it properly and prevent it from being contaminated in an other way. Here are tips for doing that:

Choose food safe containers

Use a food-grade water storage container that has a top that can be closed tightly.

- Never use a container that has previously been used for anything that is toxic (chemicals, pesticides, etc.).
- If you re-use food or beverage containers, choose 2-liter plastic soft drink bottles. Plastic jugs or cardboard containers that have had milk or fruit juice are not a good option because milk protein and fruit sugars cannot be fully removed from these containers and provide an environment for bacteria to grow.
- A container with a narrow mouth, a lid, and a tap for water to come out is the best option to protect the water. When water is stored in a container with a wide mouth, it is easy to scoop out a drink with a cup—but if either the hand or the cup is not clean, it may contaminate the water.

Sanitize the containers

It is important to use clean containers. Here is how to sanitize the containers:

- Wash container with dish soap and warm water. Make sure that there is no residual soap.
- Make a sanitizing solution by adding 1 teaspoon of household liquid bleach (use bleach with no scent) to 1 quart (32 ounces or about 1 liter) of water.
- Pour sanitizing solution into the clean container, cap and shake well, making sure that the solution coats the entire inside of the container.
- Let sit 30 seconds, and then pour out solution.
- Let air dry OR rinse with clean water that has already been made safe, if available.

Store the water

- Label container as “drinking water” and include a storage date.
- After the container is filled with sanitized water, seal it with a secure lid.
- Keep stored water in a place with a fairly constant cool temperature.
- Do not store water containers in direct sunlight.
- Do not store water containers in areas where toxic substances, such as gasoline or pesticides, are stored.

Using water that is not boiled or is not disinfected when a boil water notice is given

Although water that is not boiled or not disinfected can be used for basic needs, it is best to take some extra safety steps to minimize the risk of getting sick. It is important to not swallow the water and not to use it in your food preparation process. Here are a few tips:

* **Washing your hands**

Vigorous handwashing with soap and your tap water is safe for basic personal hygiene. However, if you are washing your hands to prepare food or before eating, you should use boiled (then cooled) water, disinfected or bottled water with handwashing soap. Hand sanitizer may substitute for boiled water for handwashing if the hands are not visibly soiled. When hands are soiled and water is not available try to use hand wipes that have sanitizer on the wipe clothes.

* **Washing the dishes**

If you have enough bottled water you can wash the dishes with it. If you have a dishwasher be sure to use the sanitizing cycle. If it does not have a sanitizing cycle, or you are not sure if it does, you may hand wash dishes and utensils. Here is how to do it:

1. Wash the dishes as you normally would with warm water and dish soap.
2. Fill the rinse sink with lukewarm water and a teaspoon of bleach for every gallon of water you use.
3. Soak the dishes (fully immersed) for at least one minute in the lukewarm bleach-added water.
4. Let the dishes completely air dry.

Bathing and showering

Un-boiled water will generally be safe for bathing/showering. Adults or children should take care not to swallow water when showering.

Special considerations:

- Use caution when bathing infants and young children. Consider giving them a sponge bath to reduce the chance of them swallowing water.
- People who are immunocompromised/immunosuppressed, and/or have open cuts, wounds, or sores should not bathe/shower with un-boiled water when a boil water advisory has been issued.

Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater/facts.asp> and <http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/drinking/making-water-safe.html>, Water Storage Containers: <http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/drinking/cleaning-preparing-storage-containers.html>
- Red Cross: http://www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA_CustomProductCatalog/m4440181_Food_and_Water-English_revised_7-09.pdf
- For questions about the water system, please call NMED at 505-476-8620 or 877-654-8720.
- For questions about potential health problems associated with the water, please call NMDOH at 505-827-0006.

Reference

Boiling can be used as a pathogen reduction method that should kill all pathogens. Water should be brought to a rolling boil for 1 minute. At altitudes greater than 6,562 feet (greater than 2000 meters), you should boil water for 3 minutes. Boiling (rolling boil for 1 minute) has a very high effectiveness in killing bacteria, Cryptosporidium, Giardia, and viruses. (http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/travel/backcountry_water_treatment.html)