



# DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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## BOIL WATER NOTICES

### Frequently Asked Questions from Food Service Establishment Operators

Food service providers are responsible to protect their customers, employees and the public from potentially contaminated drinking water. If a boil water notification is issued for drinking water, people in the establishment may be exposed to disease causing organisms in the water. If potential exposures cannot be controlled, the facility must be closed until the drinking water is determined to be safe for consumption.

If your facility is on a public well, please refer to the fact sheet “Public Drinking Water Suppliers.”

The term boil water notice will be used throughout this document. The information provided below applies to Boil Water Orders, Boil Water Notices and Boil Water Advisories. It does NOT apply to Do Not Use Orders. Do Not Use Orders are more restrictive; contact your local health department in the event of a Do Not Use Order.

When a Boil Water Notice has been issued:

- Do NOT allow customers or staff to drink tap water that has not been boiled.
- Do NOT give customers or staff any food, ice or beverages made with tap water unless the water is boiled as part of the cooking process, such as cooking pasta or soup.
- Do NOT use tap water for washing and preparing food that will not be cooked unless the water has been boiled.

#### HOW LONG MUST WATER BE BOILED TO MAKE IT SAFE?

At least 1 minute. Bring water to a full rolling boil and continue to boil for at least one minute. Water may take at least 20 to 30 minutes to cool, so plan ahead.

#### WHY WAS A BOIL WATER NOTICE ISSUED?

Boil water notices are issued to protect consumers from drinking water that may have been contaminated with disease causing organisms. They are typically issued when an unexpected condition such as a water main break, a flood or power outage has created a potential for dangerous organisms to contaminate the water supply. The specific reason for each boil water notice will be listed on the notice.

#### HOW LONG WILL THE BOIL WATER NOTICE BE IN PLACE?

A boil water notice typically lasts for 24 to 48 hours, but it can last for several days depending on the cause. A public announcement will be made when laboratory results confirm the notice has been lifted and it is safe to use the water without boiling it first. Your water utility or local health department may have more detailed information regarding how long the event is expected to last.

## **MUST I CLOSE WHEN A BOIL WATER NOTICE IS ISSUED?**

The safest thing to do is to close, but unless the Health Department directs otherwise, your food service establishment may remain open if your customers and staff can be protected. In addition to boiling water or using alternate water sources, you will need to:

- restrict the menu to foods that can be prepared with limited water;
- use prepared foods such as canned vegetables, pre-washed produce and bottled drinks;
- discard all ice that was produced in the building and turn off the ice machine;
- discontinue use of post-mix beverage equipment; and,
- ensure all staff on all shifts understand and implement all necessary protective measures.

## **WHAT IS AN ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATE SOURCE FOR SAFE DRINKING WATER?**

Acceptable alternate sources for drinking water include:

- bottled water that is certified for sale in New York State;
- water from another public water supply that is not under a boil water notice;
- water from a New York State certified bulk water hauler; and,
- water from a water tanker provided by a utility or emergency response agency.

## **CAN I USE THE BEVERAGE FOUNTAIN?**

Soda from pre-mixed soda canisters does not use your tap water and may be served, but the water and ice dispensers must be turned off.

Post-mix soda fountains mix tap water with syrup from canisters to create the soda. Post-mix fountains and the water and ice features of any fountain must not be used until the boil water notice is lifted and the machine and water lines have been flushed and disinfected per the manufacturer's direction. Place clear written notes that say "Do Not Use" on soda fountains, soda guns and juice guns.

## **CAN I USE MY ICE AND ICE MACHINE?**

Ice from your ice maker may be used only if you are certain that it was made well in advance of the boil water notice. Discard ice if you cannot be sure when it was made. Bagged or packaged ice made from a potable water source that is not under a boil water notice may be used instead.

Discard all ice that may be questionable. Empty and unplug your ice machine and place a clearly written note that says "Do Not Use" on it. Do not restart the ice machine until the boil water notice is lifted and the lines and machine have been properly flushed and disinfected. Check your manufacturer's information for directions. The ice bin, scoops and ice buckets must also be washed and disinfected before they are safe to use.

## **CAN I USE THE COFFEE MAKER?**

Yes. Properly operating coffee makers heat and hold water at temperatures that are sufficient to control harmful organisms.

## **CAN I USE THE WATER TO WASH PRODUCE?**

Produce and other food items that will not be thoroughly cooked must be washed using water that has been boiled and cooled. Bottled water or water from an acceptable alternate source as described previously may also be used.

## **CAN I USE THE WATER TO COOK WITH?**

Tap water used for food preparation or cooking must be boiled first unless the food will be thoroughly cooked such as with boiled foods or baked goods.

## **CAN I USE FOOD PREPARED WITH TAP WATER DURING THE BOIL WATER NOTICE?**

No. Discard any food that was prepared or washed with the tap water unless the food was thoroughly cooked afterwards.

## **CAN MY EMPLOYEES USE THE WATER FOR WASHING HANDS?**

Employees can use the tap water directly from the faucet for washing with soap. Antimicrobial products that do not require water such as hand sanitizer gels are never an acceptable substitute for washing with soap and water. Remind employees of the importance of proper hygiene and glove use.

## **CAN WE USE HAND SANITIZING GELS OR WIPES?**

Hand sanitizer gels and wipes may be used in addition to proper hand washing with soap and water. Hand sanitizers used alone are not as effective as washing with soap and water and are never an acceptable substitute for hand washing.

## **WHAT ABOUT SINKS AND WATER FOUNTAINS?**

All water fountains accessible to the public should be turned off wherever possible. Clearly written notes that state "Do Not Drink" should be posted on all water fountains, spigots and sinks.

## **WHAT ABOUT SINKS IN WASHROOM?**

Sinks must remain available for hand washing with soap and water, but there should be clearly written notes that state "Do Not Drink" at all sinks.

## **CAN THE TAP WATER BE USED TO WASH DISHES AND UTENSILS?**

### Hand-washed dishes and utensils:

Yes, dishes can be washed with tap water but they must be given a final sanitizing rinse with a dilute bleach solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented regular bleach (5.25%) per gallon of water. Items must completely air dry before use. This important air drying step will ensure that dangerous parasites such as *Cryptosporidium* are destroyed.

### Dishwashers (Commercial and Residential Style):

Yes, dishwashers can be used as long as the machine is operated per manufacturer's instructions. Items must completely air dry before use. This important air drying step will ensure that dangerous parasites such as *Cryptosporidium* are destroyed.

## **CAN THE TAP WATER BE USED TO WASH FOOD CONTACT SURFACES, EQUIPMENT, FLOORS AND WALLS?**

Tap water may be used to prepare your usual washing and sanitizing solutions for surfaces, but food contact surfaces must be allowed to completely air dry before they are used. Air drying will ensure that dangerous parasites such as *Cryptosporidium* are destroyed. If surfaces cannot completely air dry before use, boiled or bottled water must be used for washing and sanitizing solutions.

Unless otherwise directed by the Health Department, tap water can be used as usual with your normal cleaning products to clean floors, walls and other surfaces that foods do not contact.

## **WHAT MUST BE DONE WHEN THE BOIL WATER IS LIFTED?**

Flush all water lines for at least 5 minutes and then clean and sanitize all sinks and fixtures. If your service connection is long or complex (as they are in a commercial plaza), consider flushing the water lines for a longer period. Your building superintendent or landlord should be able to advise you on longer flushing times.

Flush and disinfect all equipment with direct water connections such as your soda dispensing machines, ice machines, drinking fountains and steam tables per the manufacturer's instructions. Run equipment for a full cycle and flush contacts to waste.

Flush appliances such as your water heater and water tanks. Backwash or replace any water filters per the manufacturer's instructions.

Clean and sanitize all food/beverage/ice equipment and food contact surfaces that were in use at the time of the water emergency.

*More information can be found in the fact sheet "Basic Information for All Consumers" which is available from the New York State Department of Health or your local health department. This document does not revise or supersede any regulations or permit requirements.*

August 2023