



Community Drinking Water Advisories

Guidance for Schools

What is the purpose of this document?

To answer questions most often asked during a drinking water advisory.

What triggers a drinking water advisory?

Community public water supplies (CPWSs) will issue a drinking water advisory when evidence indicates the sanitary integrity of the CPWS was compromised.

Events that might lead to an advisory include, but are not limited to, sanitary defects, security breaches, water main breaks, water treatment process failure, low or negative distribution system pressure, flooding, and cross-connection and backflow from a non-potable water source to the distribution system.

How does a CPWS respond to contamination events?

If bacteriological contamination is detected, the system must be disinfected. This requires chlorination if the system does not permanently disinfect. At the same time, the CPWS issues a Boil Water advisory.

If the CPWS suspects chemical contamination, the CPWS issues a Do Not Drink or Do Not Use advisory. If the chemical contaminant should not be ingested, the CPWS issues a Do Not Drink advisory. If the chemical should not be ingested, be inhaled, or come into contact with skin, a Do Not Use advisory is issued.

How is the CPWS disinfected?

One of the CPWS responses to biological contamination will be disinfection. In most cases this involves emergency chlorination in CPWS that do not chlorinate, which can last for two to five days. In some cases, permanent chlorination may be instituted. When chlorine is added to non-chlorinating systems the water may temporarily become a reddish brown color. This does not present a health hazard.

How should water be used?

In the case of a Boil Water advisory, do not drink the water without boiling it first. Bring all water to a rolling boil for one minute and let it cool before using, or use bottled water. Boiled or bottled water should be used for drinking, brushing teeth, washing dishes, and food preparation until further notice. Boiling kills bacteria and other organisms in the water.

Do Not Drink or Do Not Use advisories require that individuals not drink, or use, the water

During emergency chlorination and/or flushing procedures, can people drink the water?

In the case of a Boil Water advisory, yes if the water is boiled first. In the case of a Do Not Drink or Do Not Use advisory, no, since suspected chemical contamination may be present.

What potential health effects are associated with contamination?

Biological organisms are among the oldest health threats to drinking water quality. Fecal contamination and/or waterborne pathogens that may cause disease include bacteria, viruses, parasitic protozoa, some algae, and helminths (worms). Most health effects are short-term in nature. These include acute gastrointestinal illness with diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, nausea, vomiting, jaundice, and other symptoms, most cases of which result in mild illness. They may pose a greater health risk for infants, young children, people over age 65, and people with severely compromised immune systems.

If chemical contamination is suspected, a Do Not Use or Do Not Drink advisory is issued, and the specific chemicals or health effects may not be known immediately.

What should I do if I have symptoms?

People concerned about their health, experiencing persistent symptoms, or who are at increased risk should seek advice from their health care providers.

Can the water be used for cooking or making beverages?

In the case of a Boil Water advisory, no, not unless it has first been boiled. Any beverage combined with water from the water supply must be discarded, and beverage dispenser systems directly connected to the water supply, e.g. coffee machines, post-mix beverage dispensers, cannot be used until the boil water advisory has been lifted and the beverage lines have been flushed with safe water.

Do Not Drink or Do Not Use advisories require that individuals not drink, or use, the water.

Can water be used to prepare foods?

No, use pre-washed fruits and vegetables and thaw foods in the refrigerator. During a boil water advisory, boiled water that has cooled may be used to wash fruit and vegetables.

Is it safe to bathe, shower, or hand wash with this water?

No, not during a Do Not Use advisory.

However, the water is safe for any of these activities during a Boil Water or Do Not Drink advisory. Be careful not to swallow any water when bathing or showering. However, infants and young children should not bathe using contaminated water since they may swallow some of it. Washing your hands regularly with soap and water can protect you from many illnesses caused by viruses and bacteria. The only concerns with the water have to do with consuming it.

Can the water be used for dishwashing?

In the case of a Boil Water notice, yes. Utensils, pots, pans, and dishes may be washed, rinsed, and sanitized by using a commercial hot water or chemical sanitizing dishwashing machine provided the operating temperature and sanitizer concentration meet manufacturer's specifications and are verified by the operator. Manual washing with a sanitizer approved by MDH at an appropriate concentration for the sanitizer is also possible.

In a Do Not Drink or Do Not Use notice, it is recommended that individuals not use the water for dishwashing.

Is it safe to brush teeth with this water?

No, not during Do Not Drink and Do Not Use advisories. Yes, if the water is boiled first during a Boil Water advisory.

Can ice be made with this water?

In the case of Boil Water, Do Not Drink, and Do Not Use advisories, ice should not be made with this water. Use commercial ice made from an establishment that is not affected by an advisory. In addition, ice that has already been made or ice produced by an ice maker should be discarded. Ice bins should be washed with water from an approved source and sanitized in place prior to reuse. Sanitation can be accomplished by application of a solution containing approximately one tablespoon bleach per gallon of water for 30 seconds.

How about washing clothes?

Yes. However, the water may have a reddish color due to chlorination, which may leave reddish stains on clothes.

What do I do with my softener or filters?

It is recommended softeners or filters be bypassed or not used during an advisory. If they are not, softeners or filters should be disinfected and cleaned after the advisory according to manufacturers' recommendations.

Is it safe for animals to drink this water?

No, not during Do Not Drink and Do Not Use advisories. Yes, if the water is boiled first during a Boil Water advisory.

Will chlorine in the water harm fish?

Yes. Chlorine will kill many fish found in aquariums and minnows at bait shops.

Can this water be used on plants or gardens with edible plants?

In a Boil Water advisory, yes. In a Do Not Drink or Do Not Use advisory, the effect on plants is unknown and it is recommended the water not be used on plants.

How can the impact of a drinking water advisory be reduced?

The impact may be reduced by developing site-specific emergency plans, having a plan in place to hold or segregate food that was processed during a drinking water advisory, evaluating the business case for back-up water supplies, considering establishment of mutual support arrangements with neighboring businesses or a water hauler (see MDH website for more information), and meeting with municipal or local officials to form a mutual understanding of how limited water supplies may be distributed during a drinking water advisory or other water emergency.

Where do I go for more information?

Guidelines on how to lessen the risk of exposure to microbes or chemicals are available from the Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 800-426-4791.

Minnesota Department of Health
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/water>
651-201-4700



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