**Guidance for Emergency Action Planning for Retail Food Establishments Massachusetts Food Protection Program**

<http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eohhs2terminal&L=6&L0=Home&L1=Provider&L2=Guidance+for+Businesses&L3=Food+Safety&L4=Retail+Food&L5=Policies+and+Guidelines&sid=Eeohhs2&b=terminalcontent&f=dph_environmental_foodsafety_p_emergency_plans&csid=Eeohhs2>

**COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING BOIL WATER ADVISORIES**

1. **What is the proper way to disinfect my water so that it is safe to drink?**

The preferred method of treatment is boiling. Boiling water kills harmful bacteria and parasites (freezing will not disinfect water). Bring water to a full rolling boil for at least 1 minute to kill most infectious organisms. For areas without power add 8 drops, about ¼ teaspoon, of unscented household beach per gallon of water.

1. **How should I wash my hands during boil water advisory?**

Based on the current conditions of the affected public water supplies, vigorous hand washing with soap and your tap water is safe for basic personal hygiene. If you are washing your hands to prepare food, if at all possible, you should use boiled (then cooled) water or bottled water with hand washing soap.

1. **Is potentially contaminated water (where Cryptosporidium is not the significant contaminant) safe for washing dishes or clothes?**

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

1. **Is potentially contaminated water safe for bathing and shaving?**

The water may be used for showering, baths, shaving and washing, so long as care is taken not to swallow or allow water in eyes or nose or mouth. Children and disabled individuals should have their bath supervised to ensure water is not ingested. The time spent bathing should be minimized. Though the risk of illness is minimal, individuals who have recent surgical wounds, are immunosuppressed, or have a chronic illness may want to consider using bottled or boiled water for cleansing until the advisory is lifted.

1. **How should I wash fruit and vegetables and make ice?**

Fruits and vegetables should be washed with boiled (then cooled water) or bottled water or water sanitized with 8 drops (about ¼ teaspoon) of unscented household bleach per gallon of water. Ice should be made with boiled water, bottled water or sanitized water.

1. **What if I have already consumed potentially contaminated water?**

Even if someone has consumed potentially contaminated water from either a public water system or a private well before they were aware of the boil water advisory, the likelihood of becoming ill is low. Anyone experiencing symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, with or without fever, should seek medical attention.

1. **What infectious organisms might be present in contaminated water?**

Disease transmission from contaminated water occurs principally by ingesting water. The major organisms of concern are protozoa such as Giardia and Cryptosporidium, and bacteria, such as Shigella, E. coli and viruses. These organisms primarily 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 immune-compromised.

*Consumer Information on Boil Orders from MA Department of Environmental Protection*

Note: these apply to consumers, not to food establishments

Boil water orders or advisories are public announcements advising the public that they should boil their tap water for drinking and other human consumption uses like cooking, hand washing, brushing teeth, etc. Boil water orders are **preventative** measures issued to protect public health from waterborne infectious agents that **could be** or are known to be present in drinking water. Boil water orders are issued by the MassDEP Drinking Water Program (DWP) when MassDEP DWP determines that the consumers of a particular public water system should take precautionary measures with their tap water.

When a boil order or advisory is issued the local public water supplier (PWS) must take appropriate corrective action, continue to monitor its water supply, and notify customers when it has remedied the problem and the boil water order is lifted. The [PWS should be contacted](http://www.mass.gov/dep/about/organization/pwscont.xls) *f*or details, and in limited instances, consumers may find more information on their [city or town's web site](http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/drinking/matowns.htm). For general information on boil water orders consumers may also check the MassDEP or US EPA website and fact sheets on contaminants.

Below are general precautions MassDEP recommends you take when a boil water order has been issued for your community.

**General Precautions**

**DISCARD**any ice, juice, formula, stored water and uncooked foods that were prepared with tap water during the period of concern.

**USE BOILED OR BOTTLED WATER** for drinking, food preparation, mixing baby formula, making ice, washing food, manual utensil and equipment washing, rinsing and sanitizing, brushing teeth or any other activity involving the consumption of water.

**CHILD CARE CENTERS AND SCHOOLS** should use only bottled or boiled water for mixing infant formula, hand washing, and for mixing sanitizing solutions for diapering areas and surfaces such as tabletops and toys. Adult employees should use a hand sanitizer after washing hands with tap water and soap. Do not use drinking fountains and discontinue the use of water play tables. Follow all guidance provided by the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) and/or the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC).

**RETAIL FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS** must follow the guidance of the local board of health and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MassDPH). Wholesale food manufacturers must follow the guidance of MassDPH. Meat processing plants must follow the guidance of MassDPH and the United States Department of Agriculture.

**SWIMMING POOLS, HOT TUBS, AND SPAS** that are operated properly, including routine monitoring for adequate disinfection levels, may continue to operate.

**SHARE THIS INFORMATION** with all other people who drink this water, especially those who may not have received this notice directly (for example, visitors). You can do this by posting this notice in a public place or distributing copies by hand or mail.

**TRANSLATE THE PRECAUTIONS for anyone who does not understand English.**

**Tips for drinking water use during a boil order**

There are two simple and effective methods you can use to treat drinking water for microbiological contaminants (bacteria).

**Boiling:** Bring the water to a rolling boil for at least 1 minute. Laboratory data show this is adequate to make the water safe for drinking.

**Disinfecting:** Disinfectant tablets obtained from a wilderness store or pharmacy may be used. In an emergency, liquid chlorine bleach such as CloroxTM or PurexTM can be used at a dose of 8 drops (1/8 teaspoon) of bleach to each gallon of water. (Careful measurement with a clean dropper or other accurate measuring device is required when using liquid chlorine bleach.) Let stand for at least 30 minutes before use. Read the label to see that the bleach has 5-6% chlorine.

**Specific Activities**

**Washing Dishes**

You may use a dishwasher if it has a 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 by following these steps:

1. Wash the dishes as you normally would.
2. As a final step, immerse the dishes for at least one minute in lukewarm water to which a teaspoon of bleach per gallon of water has been added.
3. Allow the dishes to completely air dry.
4. You may also use boiled and cooled water or bottled water.

Young children should be given sponge baths rather than put in a bathtub where they might ingest the tap water. Adults or children should take care not to swallow water when showering.

**Brushing your Teeth**

Use only disinfected or boiled water for brushing your teeth.

**Ice**

Ice cubes are not safe unless made with disinfected or boiled water. The freezing process does not kill the bacteria or other microorganisms.

**Washing Fruit and Vegetables**

Use only disinfected or boiled water to wash fruits and vegetables that are to be eaten raw.

**Hand Washing**

You should wash your hands with soap and boiled water, or soap with bottled water. If only tap water is available, it is best to use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after you wash your hands. If neither is possible and your hands have been exposed to germs, such as after using the bathroom, washing with warm tap water and soap and thoroughly drying your hands is much better than not washing them at all. In these instances, try to keep your hands away from your mouth and use a hand sanitizer as soon as possible after you're done.

**Cooking**

Bring water to a rolling boil for 1 minute before adding food.

**Infants**

For infants use only prepared canned baby formula that is not condensed and does not require added water. Do not use powdered formulas prepared with contaminated water.

**Houseplants and Gardens**

Water can be used without treatment for watering household plants and garden plants. The exception would be things like strawberries or tomatoes where the water would contact the edible fruit.

**House Pets**

The same precautions taken to protect humans should be applied to pets. Aquatic organisms (e.g. 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.

**Flush All Taps When the Boil Water Order Is Lifted**

When flushing it is important to carefully follow the instructions provided. Flush your household and building water lines including: interior and exterior faucets, showers, water/ice dispensers, water treatment units, etc. Water heaters may need to be flushed to remove any contaminated water. Some types of water treatment devices may need to be disinfected or replaced before being used. Check with the manufacturer for details.

**Additional Resources**

**Drinking Water Safety Lookup**

Find more information about Boil, Do Not Drink & Do Not Use orders in cities and towns in Massachusetts

[Web page](http://db.state.ma.us/dep/boil_order/search.asp)

<http://db.state.ma.us/dep/boil_order/search.asp>

**FAQ: Boil Water Order**

Frequently asked questions about boil water orders.

[Web page](http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/drinking/boilfaq.htm)

<http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/drinking/boilfaq.htm>

**Instructions for Post-Boil-Water Orders**

Guidance for flushing water lines following a boil-water order. May 2010.

[Web page](http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/drinking/flushbwo.htm)

<http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/drinking/flushbwo.htm>

**Massachusetts Town/City Web Sites**

List of Massachusetts town/city web sites, organized alphabetically.

[Web page](http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/drinking/matowns.htm)

<http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/drinking/matowns.htm>

**Massachusetts Department of Public Health - Guidance for Emergency Action Planning for Retail Food Establishments**

Practical guidance for retail grocery and food service establishments to plan and respond to emergencies that creates the potential for an imminent health hazard.

[DPH Web Site](http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eohhs2terminal&L=6&L0=Home&L1=Provider&L2=Guidance+for+Businesses&L3=Food+Safety&L4=Retail+Food&L5=Policies+and+Guidelines&sid=Eeohhs2&b=terminalcontent&f=dph_environmental_foodsafety_p_emergency_plans&csid=Eeohhs2)

<http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eohhs2terminal&L=6&L0=Home&L1=Provider&L2=Guidance+for+Businesses&L3=Food+Safety&L4=Retail+Food&L5=Policies+and+Guidelines&sid=Eeohhs2&b=terminalcontent&f=dph_environmental_foodsafety_p_emergency_plans&csid=Eeohhs2>

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**

Renal Dialysis Units during a Boil Water Advisory

Practical guidance for dialysis units if boil water advisory is in effect.

[CDC Web site](http://www.cdc.gov/crypto/health_professionals/bwa/dialysis.html)

<http://www.cdc.gov/crypto/health_professionals/bwa/dialysis.html>

Water Demand in Health Care Facilities during Water Disruption Emergencies

List of uses for which safe water will be required during a water-advisory situation.

[CDC Web site](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/watersystemrepair.asp#4)

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/watersystemrepair.asp#4>

**Instructions for Post-Boil-Water Orders**

**Residents are advised to "flush" their water following the lifting of a boil order in order to clear plumbing of potentially contaminated water. Flushing your household and building water lines includes interior and exterior faucets; showers; water and ice dispensers; water treatment units, etc. Please use the following guidance:**

**Cold Water Faucets**: Run tap water until the water feels cold, one minute or more, before drinking tooth brushing, or using for food preparation. *If you have a single-lever faucet, set it to run the cold water first.*

**Hot Water Faucets**: To clear hot-water pipes and water heater of untreated water, change all faucets to hot water and flush for a minimum of 15 minutes for a typical household 40-gallon hot-water tank, 30 minutes for an 80-gallon hot water tank or larger. Hot water is then safe to use for washing hands, and for hand washing of dishes, pots and pans, etc. Never use water from the "hot" faucet for drinking, cooking, or other internal-consumption purposes.

**Dishwashers:** After flushing hot water pipes and water heater, run dishwasher empty one time.

**Humidifiers:** Discard any water used in humidifiers, Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP), oral, medical or health care devices, and rinse the device with clean water.

**Food and baby formula:** Discard baby formula and other foods prepared with water on the day or days of the boil order. (If unsure of the dates contact your water department.)

**Refrigerator water-dispensing machine:** Water dispensers from refrigerators should be flushed by at least one quart of water. If unsure of your dispenser's capacity, refer to manufacturer specifications.

**Ice cubes:** Automatic ice dispensers should be emptied of ice made during the boil order and run through a 24-hour cycle, discarding the ice to assure purging of the icemaker water supply line. For medical, dental, and food service establishments, please refer to the guidance on the Massachusetts Department of Public Health [website](http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=eohhs2modulechunk&L=4&L0=Home&L1=Government&L2=Departments+and+Divisions&L3=Department+of+Public+Health&sid=Eeohhs2&b=terminalcontent&f=dph_g_mwra_water_break&csid=Eeohhs2).

Due to the flushing of the lines by residents and the flushing of the hydrants, some customers may experience a lack of water pressure and/or discolored water. However, this is an expected result and does not pose an immediate health risk. Contact your l