How to Use Water Safely in Your Food Establishment During a Boil Water Advisory

Food service establishments are allowed to operate during the boil water advisory as long as the conditions outlined below are strictly followed.

What is the purpose of boiling the water?

Boiling destroys disease-causing microorganisms found in the water, making it safe to drink after cooling.

What immediate steps must a food establishment take when a boil water advisory is issued?

- **DO NOT** use the water for drinking, making juices and ice, washing fruits and vegetables and for preparing ready-to-eat foods.
- Turn off drinking water fountains.
- Disconnect vegetable spraying sprinkler systems. Use treated or bottled water in spray bottles to keep your vegetables moist.
- Throw away ice and beverages that may have already been prepared with the affected water supply.
- Discontinue making ice; use ice from a commercial ice supplier made with safe water.
- Disconnect ice cream machines, dipper-wells and any other food preparation equipment connected to the water supply.
- Post signs at all faucets, including the kitchen area and washrooms as a reminder of the boil water advisory and not to drink the water. See attached signs.
- To make the water safe, bring to a rapid rolling boil for at least one minute. Boil only as much water in the pot that one can comfortably lift without spilling. Ensure water is cooled appropriately before using or before direct handling to prevent scalds.
- Provide only water safe for drinking to customers.

What sources of water are approved to be used in a restaurant during a boil water advisory?

- Water that has been boiled for one full minute (Water can be boiled the night before, cooled overnight and stored in a covered disinfected container. Always ensure water is cooled appropriately before use or direct handling to prevent scalds.)
- Commercially bottled water
- Hauled water from an alternate approved supply not affected by the boil water advisory

Can I still use the cold beverage dispensing machine?

No. Beverage machines connected to the cold water supply used to dispense cold drinks (slush, carbonated beverages, iced cappuccino, etc.) must not be used during the boil water advisory.

Can I use tap water to prepare food products that use water as an ingredient without cooking?

No. Use boiled, bottled or an alternate safe water source in the preparation of food products such as powdered drinks, puddings, jellies, sauces, etc.

Can I use tap water to prepare food that will be boiled?

Yes. Tap water can be used to prepare food that will be boiled as long as the water is brought to a rolling boil for one minute. Ensure water is cooled appropriately before use or before direct handling to prevent scalds.

Can I use commercial coffee brewers and hot tea towers during a boil water advisory?

Yes. Ensure your coffee maker and hot tea towers produce water at 70ºC/160°F. This temperature is sufficient to inactivate disease-causing microorganisms. It is recommended that the coffee pot be held for at least **five minutes** on the burner before consumption. The temperature should be verified using a probe thermometer.

Is the water safe for handwashing?

Yes. Wash hands using tap water and soap, making sure to lather and scrub all surfaces of the hand for a minimum of 20 seconds. Rinse hands well with running water, and dry with a paper towel. After washing hands with tap water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing more than 60% alcohol. Ensure that a hand sanitizer is provided at each handwashing station including public washrooms. Good handwashing practice should be emphasized to all staff.

Can the commercial dishwasher be used to clean and disinfect dishes?

Yes. Follow your normal dishwashing procedure, and ensure that the dishes have enough time for complete air drying to take place.

Can I use a glass washer with a cold water rinse?

No. Glass washers with a cold water rinse must not be used during the boil water advisory. It is recommended to use a hot water sanitizing cycle to wash and sanitize the glasses. For further information, discuss with your public health inspector. Single-use glasses/cups can also be used.

Can I still wash my dishes by hand?

Yes. Follow your normal 3-compartment sink dishwashing procedure, and ensure that the dishes have enough time for complete air drying to take place

How do I disinfect food contact surfaces?

Food contact surfaces such as counter tops, cutting boards, and food equipment that cannot fit into a dishwasher or sink should be thoroughly washed to remove all food residu.es and then disinfected using a chlorine solution. To prepare the 200mg/L chlorine solution, add one teaspoon of liquid household bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite) to one litre of room temperature water that has been previously boiled, bottled or hauled. Spray or pour this solution onto the food contact surfaces and let sit for a minimum of two minutes. Make the solution daily as it loses its strength with time, therefore it should not be reused or stored. Vinegar is not an acceptable disinfectant.

Should I notify customers?

Yes. If customers ask about procedures, you can provide them with this information sheet which indicates how you are modifying food handling practices to protect them from potential contaminants. All washrooms must be posted with appropriate boil water signage – see attached sign at the end of this document.

What do I do after the boil water advisory is lifted?

- Flush all water-using fixtures by running the tap for five minutes. If your service connection is long or complex, consider flushing for a longer period of time.
- Ensure equipment with water line connections such as post-mix beverage machines, auto-fill coffee/tea makers, instant hot water heaters, ice machines, vegetable spray lines/misters etc. are 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.
- Drain and refill hot water heaters that have been set below 45°C/110°F.

Contact us at 1-833-476-4743 or submit a request online at ahs.ca/eph.

PUB-0728-201409

©2014 Alberta Health Services, Safe Healthy Environments

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International license. You are free to copy, distribute and adapt the work for non-commercial purposes, as long as you attribute the work to Alberta Health Services and abide by the other license terms. If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same, similar, or compatible license. The license does not apply to content for which the Alberta Health Services is not the copyright owner.

This material is intended for general information only and is provided on an "as is," "where is" basis. Although reasonable efforts were made to confirm the accuracy of the information, Alberta Health Services does not make any representation or warranty, express, implied or statutory, as to the accuracy, reliability, completeness, applicability or fitness for a particular purpose of such information.