DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Community Drinking Water Advisory Guidance

Guidance for the General Public, Businesses, and Institutions

What triggers a drinking water advisory?

Community public water supplies (CPWSs) issue a drinking water advisory when there may be a risk of contamination.

Events that might lead to an advisory include:

- A flaw in the system that creates a potential pathway for contamination to enter the system
- Security breaches
- Water main breaks
- Water treatment process failures (for example, a pump fails and not enough treatment chemical is added)
- Low or negative pressure in the distribution system
- Flooding
- Introduction of a non-drinking water source into the distribution system

How does a CPWS notify the public during contamination events?

If bacteriological contamination is detected, the system must be disinfected. The CPWS must also issue a boil water advisory to the public.

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 consumed, inhaled, or come into contact with skin, the CPWS issues a do not use advisory.

How is a CPWS disinfected?

One of the responses to biological contamination is disinfection. In most cases, if a CPWS does not permanently chlorinate, this involves emergency chlorination.

Emergency chlorination can last for two to five days. In some cases, permanent chlorination may be put in place. When chlorine is added to systems that do not permanently chlorinate, the water may temporarily become a reddish-brown color.

What should I do during an advisory?

If you have questions, contact your CPWS. Do not call 911.

During a boil water advisory, boil the water before using it. Boiling kills bacteria and other organisms in the water. Bring water to a rolling boil for one minute and let it cool before using it. Another option is to use bottled water. Use boiled or bottled water for drinking, brushing teeth, washing dishes, and preparing food until further notice.

During a do not drink advisory, do not consume tap water. Use an alternative source of water for drinking, making ice, brushing teeth, washing dishes, and preparing food until further notice.

During a do not use advisory, do not use tap water for any purpose. Use an alternative source of water for drinking, making ice, brushing teeth, washing dishes, preparing food, bathing, showering, and hand washing until further notice.

What health effects are associated with contamination?

Biological contaminants may cause health effects like acute gastrointestinal illness with diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, nausea, vomiting, and jaundice. Health effects are usually short-term. Biological contamination may pose a greater health risk for infants, young children, people over age 65, and people with compromised immune systems.

Health effects from chemical contamination depend on the specific chemical or chemicals. It may take time to identify the chemical contaminant and its health effects.

What should I do if I have symptoms during a drinking water advisory?

If your symptoms persist, or if you are at increased risk for illness, seek advice from your health care provider.

Is it safe to use tap water to cook or make beverages during an advisory?

During a boil water advisory, use boiled water to cook or make beverages. Throw away any beverages or food made with tap water that was not boiled.

Do not use beverage dispenser systems directly connected to the water supply, such as coffee machines and post-mix beverage dispensers, until the boil water advisory has been lifted and the beverage lines have been flushed with safe water.

During a do not drink or do not use advisory, do not use tap water to cook or make beverages.

Is it safe to use tap water to prepare foods during an advisory?

During a boil water advisory, use boiled water to prepare foods, including washing fruits and vegetables. You may choose to use pre-washed fruits and vegetables. Thaw foods in the refrigerator, not under running water.

During a do not drink or do not use advisory, do not use tap water to prepare foods.

Is it safe to bathe, shower, or wash my hands during an advisory?

During a boil water or do not drink advisory, adults may use water to bathe or shower. Be careful not to swallow any water when bathing or showering. Infants and young children should not bathe or shower using contaminated water since they may swallow some of it. People of all ages may use tap water to wash hands. Washing your hands regularly with soap and water is encouraged to protect you from illness.

During a do not use advisory, do not bathe, shower, or wash your hands with tap water.

Is it safe to use tap water to wash dishes during an advisory?

During a boil water advisory, commercial-grade mechanical dishwashers may be used. (Home dishwashers typically do not reach temperatures that kill bacteria and should not be used.) Follow all instructions on the machine data plate. Use a thermometer to verify correct temperatures on machines that use heat to sanitize. Use chemical test strips to verify that chemical sanitizers work correctly. For manual washing, follow the Minnesota Department of Health's instructions on Safe Sanitizing.

During a do not drink or do not use advisory, do not use tap water for washing dishes.

Is it safe to use tap water to brush teeth during an advisory?

During a boil water advisory, use cooled boiled water to brush teeth.

During a do not drink or do not use advisory, do not use tap water to brush teeth.

Is it safe to use tap water to make ice during an advisory?

During a boil water, do not drink, or do not use advisory, do not use tap water to make ice. Use commercial ice made at an establishment that is not affected by an advisory.

Throw away ice that was made before or during the advisory, including ice from an icemaker. Wash ice bins with water from a safe alternative source and sanitize prior to reuse. Sanitize by making a solution of one tablespoon of regular, unscented chlorine bleach mixed with one gallon of water from an alternative source. Apply for at least 30 seconds and allow to air dry.

Is it safe to wash clothes during an advisory?

During a boil water or do not drink advisory, you may wash clothes. If the water has been chlorinated, it may have a reddish-brown color, which may stain clothes.

During a do not use advisory, do not use tap water for any purpose. Do not wash clothes.

Is it safe for animals to drink tap water during an advisory?

During a boil water advisory, boil tap water before giving it to animals to drink.

During a do not drink or do not use advisory, do not give animals tap water to drink.

Will chlorine in the water harm fish?

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

Can tap water be used for plants or gardens with edible plants during an advisory?

During a boil water advisory, you may use tap water for plants and gardens with edible plants.

During a do not drink or do not use advisory, we do not recommend using tap water for plants or gardens.

What should I do when an advisory is lifted?

1. Flush household pipes and faucets. Run each cold-water faucet for five minutes or until the water is noticeably colder.
2. Throw away any existing ice. If you have an icemaker, flush the feed lines and throw away the first new bin of ice.
3. Flush hot water heaters, water coolers, and any other water storage container. Flush with at least one full tank volume.
4. Clean water softeners and filters following the manufacturer's instructions. Replace disposable filters.

Where do I go for more information?

For more information, call

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Safe Drinking Water Hotline at 800-426-4791
- The Minnesota Department of Health's Drinking Water Protection Program at 651-201-4700

Additional Guidance for Businesses and Institutions

INCLUDES HEALTH CARE FACILITIES, SCHOOLS, RESTAURANTS, AND FOOD RETAILERS, WHOLESALERS, AND PROCESSORS

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 bulk water hauler (contact MDH Drinking Water Protection for more information on water haulers)
- 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

Can drinking water be used for kidney dialysis machines during a drinking water advisory?

Do not use drinking water for kidney dialysis machines during a boil water, do not drink, or do not use advisory. There may be chemical contamination of an unknown type.

In addition, levels of chlorine and chloramines (compounds formed by reactions between chlorine and ammonia in the water) may increase during a drinking water advisory. Chlorine and chloramines must *always* be removed from the water used in dialysis machines, because this water comes into direct contact with blood. Dialysis patients can safely drink chlorinated water.

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July 2018

To obtain this information in a different format, call 651-201-4700.