



UK Health
Security
Agency

Boil Water Notice – Public Health Advice

Why is there a Boil Water Notice in place?

Boil Water Notices are issued by water companies as a precaution when they have identified a possible problem with the water or treatment system. You are being advised to boil your tap water in case there are any bugs in the water that could make you ill. Boiling water will kill any bugs in the water.

What do I need to do?

- **Do not drink tap water without boiling it first**
- This includes water from any appliance connected to your water supply such as a fridge water dispenser.

How do I boil water?

- Water does NOT need to be held at the boil, just bring it to the boil and then cool it.
- Boiling water can carry a risk of burn or scald accidents. Using a kettle is safest. If you must use a pan, take extra care, keep panhandles turned inwards and keep children and pets out of the way.
- Allow boiled water to cool in a covered container and keep it in the fridge or somewhere cool.

Boiled water **SHOULD** be used for:

- Drinking water and cold drinks made with water (e.g. squash/juice)
- Making up baby formula/food and sanitising bottles
- Cleaning teeth or cleaning and soaking dentures.
- Washing foods that won't be cooked, such as fruit or salad
- Making ice or ice cubes.
- Pets' drinking water

You do NOT need to use boiled water for:

- Preparing food/drinks which will be boiled anyway during the preparation process e.g. boiling potatoes or pasta or making hot tea/coffee.
- If you are not sure whether your coffee maker boils the water, fill it with preboiled water.
- Water from instant boiling water taps can be drunk only if the water is heated to 70° centigrade for five minutes or more prior to being dispensed - please check with the tap manufacturer.
- Washing up – if you wash up by hand, use hot water and detergent and rinse in boiled water that has been allowed to cool. Dishwashers can be used but use a hot wash cycle plus a drying cycle.
- Cleaning food preparation surfaces - clean kitchen work surfaces with a kitchen cleaning product as normal and allow to dry.
- Washing clothes / laundry – wash as normal.
- Washing hands – wash with soap and hot water and dry your hands. Do not use hand sanitiser instead of handwashing as it is less effective. Wash your hands:
 - after using the toilet or changing a nappy
 - before and after handling raw foods like meat and vegetables
 - before eating or handling food
 - after blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing
 - before and after treating a cut or wound
 - after touching animals, including pets or their food
- Showering/bathing – but you should avoid swallowing any water. Make sure that babies & young children do not swallow bathing water. It may be easier to sponge bath babies and don't let them suck the sponge.
- Flushing the toilet
- Watering plants
- Providing water to horses, cattle or sheep

Can I use bottled water instead of boiling water?

Yes, bottled water bought from a shop or supplied by your water company is a safe alternative to boiling water.

Do I need to boil the water if I have a water filter at home?

Yes, you still need to boil water because most home water filters don't remove all bugs.

Can I use water purification tablets instead of boiling water?

No, water purification tablets are not recommended – use boiled or bottled water.

Throwing away stored water and ice

If you have recently filled an appliance or container with unboiled water (e.g. water jug, water bottles, bottle of diluted juice/squash, fridge water/ice dispenser) discard the water, wash and rinse with cooled boiled water.

If you made ice cubes just before the boil water notice was issued, throw them away, wash and dry the container and make new ice using cooled boiled water or bottled water.

Babies

You should use cooled boiled water for making up baby feeds. Always sterilise baby bottles.

Bottled water can be used but some types of bottled water may not be suitable for making up infant formula because of high salt levels. If you have to use bottled water to make up a feed, check the label to make sure the sodium (also written as Na) level is less than 200 milligrams (mg) per litre, and the sulphate (also written as SO or SO₄) content is not higher than 250 mg per litre.

Pregnant women

Pregnant women should follow the advice above about boiling water. If they develop symptoms they should seek advice from their GP.

Dialysis patients

Dialysis patients should follow the advice above given about boiling water. For any concerns regarding your dialysis please contact your dialysis administrator.

People at increased risk during a boil notice.

Some people are at increased risk of infection, so need be especially careful not to drink unboiled tap water. This includes:

- Young children and babies
- People with weaker immune systems due to old age or health issues such as leukaemia, lymphoma, untreated HIV infection, chemotherapy or people taking medicines that weaken immunity

If such people develop symptoms, they should seek advice from their GP or specialist.

What if I accidentally drink unboiled water?

The risk of becoming ill is very low and you do not need to take any action.

If you develop diarrhoea, vomiting or abdominal cramps seek medical attention in the usual way. You may be asked to provide a poo sample to find out why you are ill.

Advice for anyone with diarrhoea or vomiting:

- Drink lots of fluids, such as water or squash – take small sips if you feel sick
- Eat when you feel able to – you do not need to eat, or avoid eating, any specific foods
- Stay off school or work until you've not been sick or had diarrhoea for at least 48 hours.
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently
- Wash any clothing or bedding that has poo or vomit on it separately on a hot wash
- Clean toilet seats, flush handles, taps, surfaces and door handles every day, ideally using a bleach-based cleaner
- Do not prepare food for other people, if possible
- Do not share towels or flannels/washcloths
- Do not use a swimming pool until two weeks after the symptoms stop

Priority Services Register for vulnerable customers

If you have a medical need, your water company may be able to give you extra help, like delivering bottled water in an emergency. To get this extra help, make sure your name is added to your water company's Priority Services Register. For South West Water please call 0344346 1010.