

Frequently Asked Questions for Food Establishments during a Boil Water Notice

Does this Notice affect establishments preparing and selling foods?

Yes.

- Potable water is required for many aspects of food preparation, cooking and cleaning. Due to the additional risk, food establishment operators are requested to take a more stringent approach to this advisory. The operator will need to consider if they can provide adequate potable water, if not then consider closing. If unsure, contact your local Environmental Health Officer.

Does the Notice affect food preparation in my establishment?

Yes.

- If using tap water in your food product, **the minimum internal temperature of the food item must reach 74°C or higher.**
- If using tap water to cook your food product, ensure that the water is brought to a rolling boil for a minimum of one minute.
- Bottled or boiled water must be used when washing ready to eat food products that will not be cooked afterward or pre-washed items must be purchased.
- Tap water may be used to thaw food in a preparation sink, as long as the product is cooked afterward and reaches a minimum internal temperature of 74°C **or higher.**
- Containers used to hold water must be food grade and must not have previously held highly allergenic substances such as dairy, egg, wheat, or nut products.

What is the accepted method for boiling water?

- Bring water in a pot to a rolling boil for one minute. The flat taste of boiled water can be improved by pouring it back and forth from one container to another and/or allowing it to stand for a few hours.

- Boil as much water in a pot as you can comfortably lift without spilling. Caution should always be exercised when handling boiling water to minimize the risk of burns.
- Provide adequate protection against contamination of the water after boiling.

Can I use chemically disinfected water?

- Disinfecting your tap water instead of boiling is a safer way to prepare large quantities of water for kitchen use.
- Water can be prepared in large 22.5L (5 gallon) containers first thing in the morning. Use a ratio of 1 drop (0.05 ml) of unscented bleach (5.25%) per one liter of room temperature water and let stand for a minimum 30 minute to allow for contact time.

What do I do with food products produced during the water advisory?

- There should be no problems if the product reached an internal temperature of 74°C or higher during the cooking stage.
- To be safe, products that did not undergo a cooking/pasteurization stage should be discarded.

What can I do about ice, ice making, beverage dispensers, and water units?

- Ice that was bagged or made prior to the issuance of the water advisory may be used.
- Ice produced in ice machines after the advisory must be discarded, the machines cleaned/sanitized and not restarted until the advisory is rescinded.
- Disconnect or turn off water vending machines, drinking fountains, ice/syrup machines, produce misters, ice making units and soda machines to prevent their use.
- Grocery stores must not use automatic misting machines on produce.
- Not all water treatment systems are certified to remove bacteria, viruses and protozoa. Some are designed for chemical removal while others are designed for aesthetic improvements. If the manufacturer cannot assure safety, then the water should be boiled before use.
- In-line filters should be backwashed or replaced after the advisory is rescinded.
- Discontinue the use of dipper wells. Use a separate, regularly sanitized scoop for each flavor (to avoid consumer exposure to allergens) until the Boil Water Notice is rescinded and use of the dipper well can resume.

The food premises has a dishwasher. Is it safe to use?

Yes.

- You can continue to use your high temperature (82°C) rinse commercial dishwasher. If you are using a low temperature chemical dishwasher ensure that the sanitize rinse cycle is fully operational and your sanitizer concentration is adequate.

Can I continue to wash dishes by hand?

Yes.

- Manually wash, rinse and sanitize food equipment and cooking utensils utilizing the approved three-compartment sink method. Sanitize in a 100 ppm chlorine solution, immerse for one minute and let dishes air dry.
- Use single service utensils and dishware for customers.

Can I use the water for hand washing?

Yes.

- Use proper hand washing techniques and be extra diligent when washing hands.
- Wearing plastic gloves does not replace good hand washing when preparing foods.

Can I clean with tap water?

Yes.

- Ensure that you are using an appropriate concentration of sanitizing agent. This can be done using test strips or by following manufacturer's instructions.
- Food contact surfaces should be washed with clean water and then sanitized using an acceptable sanitizing agent. Sanitizing agents for food contact surfaces include; unscented regular household bleach (5.25%), iodophors, and quaternary ammonia compounds (QUATS).
- To prepare stock bleach solutions add 2-4 ml of 5.25% bleach per liter of water (1/2 teaspoon per litre). This will make a 100 to 200 ppm chlorine solution.

How do I deal with beverages?

- Coffee machines usually produce water around 70 to 80 degrees Celsius, which is sufficient to destroy disease causing microorganisms. However, a sufficient amount of time is needed to ensure that all harmful organisms are destroyed. Therefore let the coffee stand for at least five minutes before drinking.

- Percolated coffee and tea are safe to serve since the water is boiled before use.
- Discontinue mixed cold beverages containing water unless you are using bottled/boiled water or substitute with canned products.
- Discontinue the use of drinking fountains.
- Serve bottled or boiled water to your customers.

We do our laundry in house. Should we change the way that we launder our linens in any way?

- No. It has been demonstrated that normal washing and drying cycles are adequate in sanitizing linens.

What happens after the water quality advisory is rescinded?

- Re-start, flush and sanitize any water-using fixture or piece of equipment in accordance with the manufacturers' specifications. This may vary from fixture to fixture. Remember to include misters, icemakers (discard the first bin full), and beverage machines.
- Run cold water faucets and drinking fountains for at least 3 minutes each if they have not been used in the last 24 hours.

How will I know when the water quality notice is lifted?

- Once it has been determined that the water is safe to drink, the Medical Health Officer will issue a statement through the media.

Are patrons who drank water before the notice going to get sick?

- Public Health will monitor for any signs of community illness.
- Persons concerned about their health should be directed to their family physician.

If you have any questions regarding your establishment and Boil Water Notice, please contact your local health unit.

Health Protection Offices:

Sechelt: 604-885-5164
Squamish: 604-892-2293
Whistler: 604-932-3202
Powell River: 604-485-3310

North Shore: 604-983-6700
Richmond: 604-233-3147
Vancouver: 604-675-3800

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