

# Boil Water Advisory

## WHAT TO DO ....

Genesee County Health Department

### What is a "boil water advisory?"

A boil water advisory (BWA) is issued to protect the community from waterborne infectious agents. A BWA is issued only after careful consideration among representatives from public health, regulatory agencies, and municipal departments after positive tests (e.g., positive samples for fecal coliforms, changes in turbidity measurements) or line breaks.

### What should I do when under a BWA?

For personal use, create a supply of water for cooking, drinking, and tooth brushing by bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute. Timing starts when the water starts to bubble. Cool the water then place in clean containers for use or refrigerate.

Hot (not boiled) soapy water can be used for dishwashing and kitchen/bathroom surface cleaning. As a precaution, add one tablespoon of bleach per gallon. Laundry water does not need to be treated. Unless specifically listed, water for showering does not need to be treated.

### Can we dialyze patients during a BWA?

Yes, if the water treatment components in use are sufficient to remove or destroy bacteria Reverse Osmosis (RO) will protect the product water from having microbial contamination. Deionization (DI) unit does not remove or destroy bacteria, so if DI is being used as the main water treatment (rather than RO), you will need a submicron or endotoxin/ultrafilter downstream of the DI unit. If an ultraviolet (UV) irradiator is used, the filter should be located after the UV irradiator. Close monitoring of the resistivity of the product water will be needed to detect any decrease in quality. Also consider weekly microbial assessment of the product water during the BWA.



PREVENT-PROMOTE-PROTECT

Keep in close contact with the municipal water supplier because they may choose to "shock" treat (hyperchlorinate) their distribution system to bring it back into compliance with the acceptable standards for drinking water. If the city "shocks" their water system, you may see chlorine/chloramine break through. Review your testing procedures with staff and alert them to be vigilant for potential break through so that patients will be protected from exposure to chlorine/chloramine.

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**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.



# COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING

## Boiling Water Order's (BWO) &

### COLIFORM Maximum Contaminant Level's (MCL)

**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. Bring water to a full ROLLING boil for at least 1 minute to kill most infectious organisms.

**How should I wash my hands during a 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 and preparing food you should use boiled (then cooled) water or bottled water with hand washing soap.

**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 dilute bleach (1 tablespoon per gallon of water). Allow dishes to completely air dry.

**Yes**, if you clean your dishes in home dishwasher using the hot wash (170 degrees) and dry cycles. Note that not all dishwashers reach this temperature. Again, allow dishes to completely dry.

**Yes**, for commercial dishwashers if you use a NSF listed washer manufactured with either a hot wash (170 degrees) or a disinfectant rinse.

**Yes**, It is safe to wash clothes in tap water.

**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 water. Children and disabled individuals should have their bathing 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 suffering from chronic illness may want to consider using bottled or boiled water for cleansing until the advisory is lifted.

**How should I wash fruits and vegetables and make ice?** Fruits and vegetables should be washed with boiled (then cooled water) or bottled water. Ice should be made with boiled water or bottled water.

**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 of the gastroenteritis, such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, with or without fever, should seek medical attention.

**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 immunocompromised.

