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Boil Water Advisory – Questions and Answers

What should I know about the home use of tap water?

For household use, tap water that has been boiled for a full minute or more may be used for food preparation, hand washing, brushing teeth, and drinking water. Commercially bottled water may also be used. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MDEP) has additional information regarding water use on its website at <http://www.mass.gov/dep/water/drinking/boilordr.htm>.

A separate fact sheet for retail food establishments has also been prepared. Due to high volume water use concerns for restaurants and similar facilities, a boiling time of five minutes, not one minute, is recommended.

Why are we told to boil water?

Due to the need to rely on water from untreated sources that passes through pipes that have not been used recently, the water that comes from the tap can be contaminated with microbiological agents – bacteria, viruses and protozoa. Not all of these are harmful, but under normal conditions our water is treated to prevent these from reaching your tap. Boiling the water will destroy these organisms.

I prepared food (e.g., soup, casseroles, salads, prepared juice mixes, etc.) using tap water on Saturday afternoon—are these products safe to eat?

No. Any food that was washed or prepared using tap water from affected communities in the MWRA distribution system from 12:00 p.m. on May 1, 2010 should be discarded due to the risk of contamination.

Can I use tap water for making coffee in an automatic coffee maker?

No. Coffee made with tap water in automatic drip coffee makers should not be used, as the temperature of the water is not high enough to remove contaminants. Bottled water or water that has been boiled for one minute should be used.

Can I use tap water for brushing teeth?

No. Bottled water or water that has been boiled for one minute should be used.

Can I use tap water for feeding my pet?

No. Bottled water or water that has been boiled for one minute should be used unless your pet normally drinks from untreated sources.

Is it safe to use tap water for making ice?

No. Ice may be made with tap water that has been boiled for 1 minute or more, with commercially bottled water, or you may purchase ice commercially from a provider outside of the communities affected by the boil water order. If you used tap water to make ice after 12:00 pm on May 1, 2010 it should be discarded.

Can I use tap water for bathing or showering?

Yes but only if extreme care is taken to not ingest the water. Parents with infants should consider sponge baths only.

I purchased vegetables and fruit from a grocery store this afternoon that used a mister to keep the food fresh—is the product still safe?

You should contact the store where you purchased the products and ask if a mister was in use after 12:00 p.m. on May 1, 2010. If a mister was used after that time, the food should be discarded as the water in the mister may have been contaminated. Grocery stores have been advised to turn misters off until the water supply is safe for consumption.

Can I wash fruits and vegetables using tap water?

No. Washing produce with water from communities affected by the boil water advisory may contaminate the product. Produce may be washed with water boiled for 1 minute, or washed with bottled water.

How can I safely wash dishware and utensils?

You may use a dishwasher if it has a sanitizing cycle. If it does not have a sanitizing cycle, or you are not sure if it does, you may hand wash dishes and utensils by following these steps
Wash the dishes as you normally would.

As a final step, immerse the dishes for at least one minute in lukewarm water to which a teaspoon of bleach per gallon of water has been added.

Allow the dishes to completely air dry.

How can I safely prepare powdered/concentrate infant formula?

Infant formulas should be prepared using boiled tap water. In the event that boiling is not practical, an alternative supply (e.g., bottled water) that is known to be safe may be used.

During a boil order, can I wash my hands using tap water?

It is recommended that you wash your hands using soap and either bottled water or tap water. An alcohol-based hand sanitizer should also be used if only tap water is available.

What should I do when the boil water advisory or order has been lifted?

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Public Health and the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) will provide specific instructions.

Consumers should flush water pipes within the home. It may be as simple as running the water for a certain time period. When flushing pipes it is important to carefully follow the instructions provided. Water heaters may need to be disinfected and flushed to remove any contaminated

water. Some types of water treatment devices may need to be disinfected and flushed to remove any contaminated water. Some types of water treatment devices may need to be disinfected or replaced before being used. Check with the manufacturer for details.

For More Information

Regular Updates will be posted on the Town of Lexington website site at <http://www.lexingtonma.gov/portal/news-events.cfm>. In addition, an information hotline called Mass 211 is available to answer general questions about the water break and other related information. It can be reached by simply dialing 211 (the same way that you dial 411) and listen to the menu choices or stay on the line. For further information, contact the Office of Community Development, Health Division, Gerard Cody, Health Director at 781-862-0500 x 237 or by email at gcody@lexingtonma.gov.