

How to Use Water Safely in Personal Service Facilities During a Boil Water Advisory

Personal Service Facilities may operate during the boil water advisory as long as the conditions outlined below are strictly followed.

What is a boil water advisory?

A boil water advisory is a notification that the drinking water supply may be contaminated with pathogenic microorganisms (e.g., *E.coli* bacteria, *Giardia* parasite), and use of the tap water can make people sick. Boiling the tap water destroys pathogens and makes the water safe to drink and use.

What immediate steps must a personal service facility implement when a boil water advisory is issued?

- Contact your local Environmental Public Health Office (phone numbers below) to determine if it is safe for you to operate. You may need to arrange for an inspection to be completed prior to operating to determine if procedures can be offered in a safe manner.
- Signs should be posted at the entrance to the facility and at all faucets, including washrooms, handsinks, equipment reprocessing areas, and staff lunchrooms as a reminder that a boil water advisory is in effect and that the water is not safe to drink or use. See attached signs.
- Provide an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, containing at least 60% alcohol, in all public and staff washrooms, and at all stand-alone hand hygiene sinks. Non-alcohol hand sanitizers are not acceptable.
- Staff are expected to wash hands at the usual frequency. However, during a boil water advisory hand washing must be followed by the application of alcohol based hand sanitizer. As an extra precaution, single-use disposable gloves may also be used after the application of hand sanitizer.
- Advise clients and staff not to use tap water for drinking. Provide a safe alternate source of water for drinking if applicable.
- Disconnect or turn off the tap water supply to all appliances, tanks, and equipment, excluding laundry machines. If the equipment cannot be used without being connected to the tap water supply, the procedure must be suspended (i.e. Colonic irrigation).
- Use a safe alternate water source in place of tap water for all client procedures, treatments, instrument cleaning, washing broken skin, and for the preparation of any solutions.
- Empty any solutions, wash bottles or disinfectants that may have been prepared with potentially contaminated water. The vessels should be cleaned, rinsed (with water from a safe alternate source) and dried before being refilled.

What are the risks and can a personal service facility operate during a boil water advisory?

When a boil water advisory event occurs, there is a potential for exposure to pathogenic organisms from direct consumption, invasive procedures, and skin contact. Having running potable water is a regulatory requirement in order for a personal service facility to operate. Potable water is required for hand hygiene, instrument reprocessing, and use in several personal service procedures. The personal service facility may be allowed to operate during a boil water advisory using alternate water sources, as long as the facility can demonstrate safe operation in a manner that does not pose a risk to public health. If the personal service facility is unable to operate in a safe manner during a boil water advisory, the facility must cease operation.

What are safe alternate water sources during a boil water advisory?

- Sterile water (for invasive procedures)
- Distilled water
- Water that has been boiled (rolling boil) for one full minute and then cooled to room temperature (for invasive procedures)
- Water from another approved public supply not affected by the advisory
- Commercially bottled water produced in locations that are not affected by the boil water advisory

What can't tap water be used for in a personal service facility during a boil water advisory?

Do not use the tap water (unless properly boiled first) for:

- Drinking
- Diluting tattoo ink
- Rinsing tattoo needles between color changes
- Washing the skin
- Mixing oral rinse solutions
- Contact within body cavities (i.e. colonic irrigation)
- Facility prepared solutions
- Diluting floatation tanks
- Filling pedicure basins and manicure soak

What is the correct way to boil water?

Boiling the tap water will destroy any pathogens that might be present, and it will make the water safe to drink and use. To correctly boil water, bring it to a rolling boil for at least one minute.

Is water from self-serve water dispensers safe to use?

In most instances, bottled water used in self-serve water dispensers is safe to use, but it depends on when and how the water was bottled. Bottling plants and water dispensers that operate in the municipality affected by the boil water advisory must treat the water to ensure that harmful microorganisms are removed. Check with the Environmental Public Health Office about sources of water that are considered to be safe.

Can tap water be used to make coffee?

During a boil water advisory, you can use your coffeemaker if it heats water to 70°C or hotter. Coffee temperature can be tested with a probe or handheld thermometer. Let the coffee sit in the pot and burner for at least five minutes before you drink it. If your coffee maker does not heat the water to at least 70°C, use bottled or boiled water to make coffee.

For pod coffee makers that percolate coffee into a cup, use bottled or boiled water as the temperature cannot be maintained long enough after percolation to destroy all pathogens.

Do water filtration devices make the tap water safe to use on clients?

Not necessarily. Many water filtration devices do not remove pathogens. If the water passes through a water filtration device in your facility, **do not** use this water unless it has been boiled first.

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL DURING A BOIL WATER ADVISORY

Can tap water be used to wash hands when performing client services?

Yes, tap water can be used for handwashing but an alcohol-based hand sanitizer must be applied afterwards. Wash your hands with warm tap water and soap, making sure to lather for at least 20 seconds. Rinse your hands well under running water and dry them with a paper towel. When hands are dry and visibly clean, apply an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol.

Can tap water be used for washing hair, showering or bathing?

Yes. Staff may wash a client's hair, and clients may take showers or baths with tap water, but they should be advised to be careful to avoid the face, and avoid swallowing any of the water.

Additional Considerations

- New tattoos and piercings or any broken skin should be covered as usual, and care must be taken not to contaminate these areas.
- Tattoo and piercing facilities may need to alter their after-care instructions in the event of a community-wide boil water advisory, to caution the client against applying contaminated water to the wound.
- Pedicure basins must not be filled with tap water unless that water is from an approved source or has been boiled properly beforehand.

CLEANING AND DISINFECTING PRACTICES

Can tap water be used for cleaning and disinfecting client contact and environmental surfaces?

Tap water can be used for general cleaning of surfaces such as walls and floors only. The facility's usual disinfectant may be prepared with tap water as applicable.

Can tap water be used for cleaning and disinfecting personal service tools and equipment?

In the event of a boil water advisory, every effort should be made to use single-use and disposable tools and equipment.

For those tools that cannot be discarded after one use, tap water cannot be used for cleaning tools and equipment during a boil water advisory. Use a safe alternate potable water source to clean and rinse the tools prior to disinfection or sterilization.

Can tap water be used for washing laundry?

During a boil water advisory, tap water may still be used for general laundry procedures. Laundry should be dried in a mechanical drying machine on a normal setting or hotter.

Can an autoclave be used during a boil water advisory?

Instruments being placed into autoclaves should have already been cleaned using water that was previously boiled, bottled water or water from another safe source. Only distilled water should be used in the autoclave itself.

Can personal service equipment that is directly connected to the water supply be used?

No, however this is dependent on the equipment and should be assessed on a case by case scenario. Contact your local Environmental Public Health Office for any specific questions related to the equipment and water quality.

PROCEDURES TO TAKE AFTER A BOIL WATER ADVISORY IS ENDED

- Flush all water-using fixtures by running the hot and cold taps for five minutes. If your service connection is long or complex (e.g. large building), consider working with maintenance staff to coordinate flushing.
- For multi-storey and large buildings, maintenance staff can flush taps starting on the bottom floor closest to the service connection by running the hot and cold taps for five minutes. Once every faucet on the entire floor has been flushed for five minutes, proceed to the next floor, and continue the procedure until the fixtures and faucets on all floors are flushed.
- Ensure all equipment with water line connections are drained, flushed, cleaned, and disinfected according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Flush, drain, clean and disinfect cisterns that contained the affected water source.
- You may need to drain and refill hot-water tanks if there was a loss of power or gas to the tank for an extended period (e.g. evacuation events).
- Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle according to the manufacturer's recommendations.
- Replace the filters on any water filtration devices and flush the fixture according to the manufacturer's directions.

Contact us at 1-833-476-4743 or [submit a request online](#) at ahs.ca/eph.

PUB-0725-202507

©2025 Alberta Health Services, Safe Healthy Environments



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International license](#). You are free to copy, distribute and adapt the work for non-commercial purposes, as long as you attribute the work to Alberta Health Services and abide by the other license terms. If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same, similar, or compatible license. The license does not apply to content for which the Alberta Health Services is not the copyright owner.

This material is intended for general information only and is provided on an "as is," "where is" basis. Although reasonable efforts were made to confirm the accuracy of the information, Alberta Health Services does not make any representation or warranty, express, implied or statutory, as to the accuracy, reliability, completeness, applicability or fitness for a particular purpose of such information.

Warning

Boil Water Advisory in Effect

This Water is not Safe for Drinking



For more information, please visit www.ahs.ca/eph or contact Healthlink Alberta at 811.



**Alberta Health
Services**

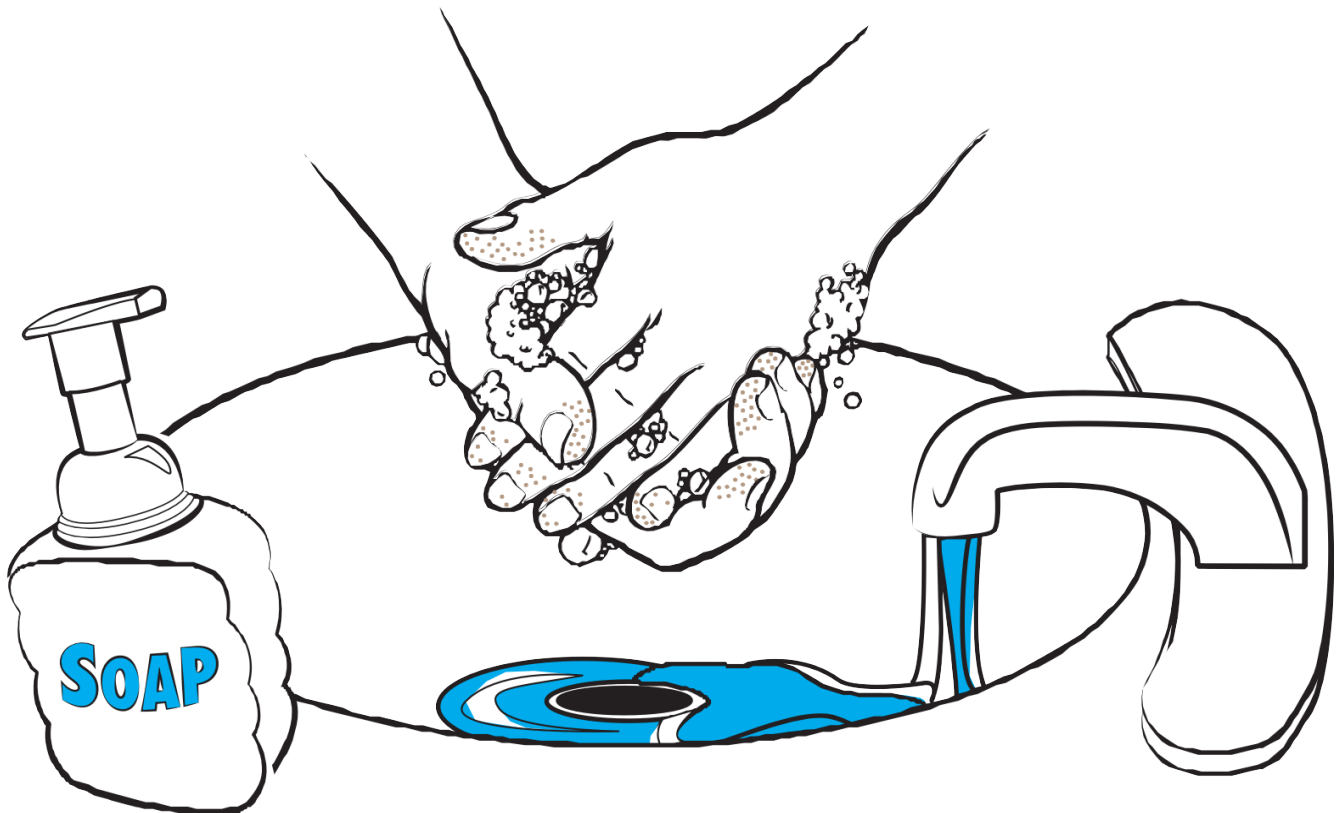
Contact us at 1-833-476-4743
or [submit a request](#)
online at ahs.ca/eph.

Warning

Boil Water Advisory in Effect

WASH YOUR HANDS

Apply hand sanitizer after handwashing



For more information, visit ahs.ca/eph or contact Healthlink Alberta at 811.



Contact us at 1-833-476-4743
or [submit a request](#)
online at ahs.ca/eph.