



BOIL WATER NOTICE FAQs

Boil water notices are common in Southwest Florida, caused by water main breaks, construction mistakes, disruptions at the water treatment plant and natural disasters like floods and hurricanes. The typical notice is issued as a precaution until water samples can be collected and analyzed.

Why are boil water notices necessary?

When the pressure in lines that transport potable water falls below 20 pounds per square inch, a boil water notice is issued as a precaution, even when contamination is unlikely. Any loss in water pressure creates the possibility of harmful bacteria entering the lines. Until laboratory tests are completed to confirm the water has not been contaminated, the boil water notice remains in effect.

What does a boil water notice mean?

A boil water notice means tap water should not be used for drinking, cooking or ice-making until tests verify the water is safe. Tests typically take 48 hours. In the meantime, tap water should be boiled to kill any microorganisms that may be present.

How long should water be boiled?

Vigorous boiling for at least one full minute is the safest and most effective method of water disinfection. Fill a pan or pot with cold water, and start timing when steady streams of bubbles pop from the bottom of the pan. Be careful lifting heavy pots and pans, and cool the water before using it for washing or tooth brushing. Store the disinfected water in clean, covered containers. Using bottled water is an option.

How does boiling water make it safe to drink?

Boiling water purifies it because disease-causing bacteria, viruses and parasites are destroyed by heat. Boiling does not remove them from the water, but it does kill them, preventing them from causing illness.

Can I wash my hands in tap water? What about food?

Tap water and antibacterial soap for hand washing is safe for basic hygiene, but if you are washing your hands to prepare food, use bottled or boiled water. Fruits, vegetables and other foods should be washed only with boiled or bottled water.

Can I use tap water for making coffee, tea, baby formula or frozen juice?

No. Water intended for drinking must be vigorously boiled for at least a full minute before being used to brew coffee or tea, or being mixed with formula, drink concentrates or juices.

Can I use my icemaker?

Ice already in your freezer when the boil water notice is issued is safe, but icemakers should be turned off until the notice is lifted. Then empty the ice tray several times to flush the water line to the ice maker. Freezing does not disinfect water.

Is it safe to use a dishwasher?

Most dishwashers do not reach high enough temperatures to kill bacteria, so dishes should be washed in boiled water. You also can wash with tap water and rinse dishes for a minute in a solution of 1 tablespoon of bleach and a gallon of tap water. Allow dishes to completely air dry.

What about laundry?

It is safe to wash clothes in tap water.

What are the recommendations for bathing and tooth brushing?

Use boiled or bottled water to brush your teeth, but tap water is fine for bathing, showering and shaving. Avoid getting water in your mouth, eyes and nose, and keep an eye on children in the bathtub. People with recent cuts, surgical wounds, immunity problems or chronic illnesses may consider using boiled water for bathing. Parents may want to use water that has been boiled and cooled to bathe newborns and young infants.

I have a water filter – doesn't that protect me?

Water filters in refrigerators and pitchers do not remove bacteria. For under-sink filters, read the manual or check with your installer to determine the filter's bacteria-removal capabilities. If in doubt, boil the water.

Can I use tap water to fill my swimming pool?

It is safe to fill your pool with tap water and let the pool chemicals do their work, but do not use pool water for drinking or cooking!

What if I drank from the tap accidentally or before I learned about the boil water notice?

If you accidentally drink tap water, don't panic – the chances of becoming ill are slim. See your doctor if you experience diarrhea, nausea, vomiting or abdominal cramps, but illnesses caused by waterborne germs usually are not serious.

Is it safe to give pets tap water?

Many pets, such as dogs, are susceptible to the same diseases as humans and can transmit the diseases to their families. Provide them with boiled or bottled water.

Can I water my plants with tap water?

Tap water is safe for house plants and outdoor irrigation.

Why does it take so long to get test results? What kinds of tests are done?

The boil water notice will remain in effect until test samples show the water is safe to drink. MIU technicians collect water samples, using specific procedures that ensure accurate testing. A commercial laboratory incubates the samples to actually grow bacteria if any are present.

How will I know when the boil water notice is lifted and I can safely use tap water again?

Visit the our website for up to date information about current and recent boil water notices. If the notice affects a large area, MIU will provide updates to local broadcast stations and newspapers.

After the boil water advisory is lifted, will my water heater be contaminated?

A slight possibility exists that a pathogen may contaminate a water heater and survive if the water temperature is maintained at 120°F or lower. However, since hot water directly from the water heater usually is not swallowed, this should not be a safety concern. A water temperature of 140°F for a half hour should kill virtually any pathogens in the water heater.