Boil Order Fact Sheet

In Massachusetts a boil order is a public-health order or directive issued by MassDEP to consumers when a public drinking water system (PWS) could be contaminated by pathogens.

General information about public health orders
MassDEP's Drinking Water program (DWP) issues public health orders when DWP determines that consumers of a particular PWS should take precautionary measures with their tap water to maintain compliance with the drinking water standards.

A public health order is a preventive measure to protect public health from a real or potential waterborne disease or contamination. MassDEP issues different types of orders, depending on the severity of the problem:

- Boil Water Order (excess levels of bacteria or other contamination)
- Do Not Drink Order (contamination for which boiling the water may not be enough treatment)
- Do Not Use Order (unknown or high-risk contaminants)

When MassDEP issues an order to the local PWS) the PWS must do the following:

- take appropriate corrective action
- notify its customers
- continue to test its water supply
- notify customers when it has remedied the problem, and the order is lifted.

In some instances, the PWS may distribute bottled water to affected customers as an alternative to boiling their water. Bottled water is safe to use during a boil order.

Consumers should always contact their local public water supplier for information during a boil order. Consumers may also find more information on their city or town website. The US EPA and MassDEP also offer information about contaminants in drinking water. Please visit https://www.mass.gov/water-supplier-operations for

Because each situation is different, it is impossible to predict how long an order will remain in effect. The order will not be lifted until testing shows that the water meets safe drinking water and public health standards. MassDEP will lift the order when the water is considered safe and no longer poses a threat to public

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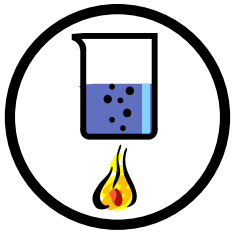
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General precautions during a boil order:
Below are general precautions MassDEP recommends when a public health order is in effect. Please check with your local water department for specific instructions.

- **DISCARD** any ice, juice, formula, stored water and uncooked foods prepared with tap water during the period of concern.
- **USE BOILED OR BOTTLED WATER** for
  - drinking
  - food preparation
  - mixing baby formula
  - making ice
  - washing food
  - manual utensil and equipment washing, rinsing and sanitizing
  - brushing teeth
  - any other activity involving the consumption of water.
- **CHILD CARE CENTERS AND SCHOOLS** should use only bottled or boiled water for
  - mixing infant formula
  - hand washing
  - mixing sanitizing solutions for diapering areas and surfaces such as tabletops and toys.

Adult employees should use a hand sanitizer after washing hands with tap water and soap. Do not use drinking fountains and discontinue the use of water play tables. Follow all guidance provided by the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) and/or the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC).

- **RETAIL FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS** must follow the guidance of the local board of health and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MassDPH). Wholesale food manufacturers must follow the guidance of MassDPH. Meat processing plants must follow the guidance of MassDPH and the United States Department of Agriculture.
- **SWIMMING POOLS, HOT TUBS, AND SPAS** that are operated properly, including routine monitoring for adequate disinfection levels, may continue to operate.
- **SHARE THIS INFORMATION** with all others who drink this water, especially those who may not have received this notice, such as visitors.

You can do this by posting this notice in a public place or distributing copies by hand or mail.

- **TRANSLATE THE PRECAUTIONS** for anyone who does not understand English.

Tips for water use during a boil order:

BOIL FOR 1 MINUTE

Boil water for at least 1 minute

Water for drinking: There are two simple methods you can use to treat drinking water for microbiological contaminants (bacteria). Both methods are effective against bacteria in water.

1. **Boiling**: Bring the water to a rolling boil for at least 1 minute. Laboratory data show this is adequate to make the water safe for drinking. You can also boil water in a microwave oven using a microwave-safe container, but it is advisable to include a glass rod or wooden or plastic stir stick in the container to prevent the formation of superheated water (water heated above its boiling point, without the formation of steam). The water should then be cooled and poured into a clean container or refrigerated until you are ready to use it.
2. **Disinfecting:** Use disinfectant tablets obtained from a wilderness store or pharmacy. In an emergency, you can use liquid chlorine bleach such as Clorox™ or Purex™ at a dose of 8 drops (1/8 teaspoon) of bleach to each gallon of water. (Careful measurement with a clean dropper or other accurate device is required when using liquid bleach.) Let stand for at least 30 minutes before use. Read the label to see that the bleach has 5-6% chlorine.

Washing dishes: 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:

1. Wash the dishes as you normally would.
2. 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.
3. Allow the dishes to completely air dry.
4. You may also use boiled and cooled water or bottled water.

Bathing and showering: Sponge-bathe young children. Do not bathe them in a bathtub where they might ingest the water. Adults or older children should take care not to swallow water when showering.

Brushing your teeth: Use only disinfected or boiled water for brushing your teeth.

Ice: Use only disinfected or boiled water to make ice cubes. Freezing does not kill bacteria or other microorganisms.

Washing food: Use only disinfected or boiled water to wash fruits and vegetables or to rinse rice or other grains.

Hand washing: Wash your hands with soap and boiled water, or soap and bottled water. If you only have tap water to use, it is best to use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after washing your hands. If neither is possible and your hands have been exposed to germs (such as after using the bathroom), washing with warm tap water and soap and thoroughly drying your hands is much better than not washing them at all. In these instances, try to keep your hands away from your mouth and use a hand sanitizer as soon as possible after you're done.

Cooking: Bring water to a rolling boil for 1 minute before adding food.

Infant formula: Use only prepared canned baby formula that is not condensed and does not need added water. Do not use powdered formulas prepared with contaminated water.

Houseplants and gardens: You can use untreated water for watering household plants and gardens. However, do not use untreated water on food plants such as tomatoes or berries.

Pets: The same precautions to protect humans apply to pets. Do not expose aquatic organisms (e.g., fish) to water containing elevated bacteria levels. If you need to refresh the organism's water, use appropriately boiled or bottled water.

Use only boiled or disinfected water for bathing and food prep.

2.) What to do after the Order is lifted

Flush all taps when the order is lifted: When flushing, it is important to follow the instructions provided. Flush your household and building water lines, including:

- Interior and exterior faucets,
- Showers,
- Water/ice dispensers,
- Water treatment units, etc.
- Water heaters may need to be 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.

Detailed guidance for what to do after a boil order ends follows:

Cold Water Faucets: Run until the water feels cold, one minute or more, before drinking, brushing your teeth, or using for food preparation. If you have a single-lever faucet, set it to run the cold water first.

Hot Water Faucets: To clear hot-water pipes and water heaters of untreated water, change all faucets to hot water and flush for at least:

- 15 minutes for a typical household 40-gallon hot-water tank
- 30 minutes for an 80-gallon hot water tank or larger

Hot water is then safe to use for washing hands, dishes, pots and pans, etc. Never use water from the hot faucet for drinking, rinsing your mouth, or cooking.

Dishwashers: After flushing hot water pipes and water heaters, run the dishwasher empty one time.

Humidifiers: Discard any water used in humidifiers, Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) machines, oral, medical or health care devices. Rinse the device with clean water.

Food and baby formula: Discard baby formula and other foods prepared with water on the day or days of the boil order. (If unsure of the dates, contact your water department.)

Refrigerator water-dispensing machine: Flush with at least one quarter of water. If unsure of your dispenser's capacity, refer to manufacturer specifications.

Ice cubes: Empty automatic ice dispensers of ice made during the boil order and run through a 24-hour cycle. Discard this ice to assure purging of the icemaker's water supply line.

Note: After a boil order, the local water department may flush hydrants. As a result of flushing both hydrants and home water lines, some customers may experience a lack of water pressure and/or discolored water. This is an expected result and does not pose an immediate health risk. Contact your local water department if you have any questions.

Other Information on Water-borne illness:

Anyone who ingests contaminated water may become ill. Infants, young children, the elderly, and people with severely compromised immune systems are more at risk of illness. Symptoms may include:

- diarrhea
- cramps
- nausea
- jaundice
- headaches
- fatigue

Symptoms may appear as early as a few hours or several days after infection and may last more than two weeks. These symptoms, however, are not just associated with water-borne illness; they may also come from other diseases. If you are ill with these symptoms, contact your health care provider.

If you have already ingested contaminated water without knowing it, there is nothing you can do about the exposure you have received. If you become ill, contact your health care provider. Follow the recommendations here until you are told your water is safe again

Always contact your local public water supplier during a boil order or other public drinking water public health orders!

A note about E. coli bacteria

E. coli is a sub-group of the fecal coliform bacteria group. There are many strains of E. coli, most of which are harmless, but some strains can cause illness. E. coli outbreaks receive much media coverage. Most outbreaks trace to food contamination (not water) caused by a specific strain of E. coli known as E. coli O157:H7. When a drinking water sample is reported as "E. coli positive", it does not mean that this specific strain is present and in fact, it probably is not. However, it does indicate recent fecal contamination. Boiling or treating contaminated drinking water with a disinfectant destroys all forms of E. coli.

MassDEP Resources

- **Look up drinking water public health orders**
  Use MassDEP's online database of public health orders to find an order for your city or town. MassDEP updates this database when a „Boil Order, Do Not Drink Order, or Do Not Use Order has been issued or lifted.

  If you do not see your town on the list but your water supplier has issued a boil order, you can search on your town's name. Searching on your town will also display any terminated boil orders for the town.

- **To find a latest contact list of all registered public water system in Massachusetts** see https://www.mass.gov/water-supplier-operations , then go down to Reporting & Public Notification and select the Excel spreadsheet for PWS, Active Sources and Contacts Spreadsheet.

- **Learn how public health orders protect us from contaminated water supplies**, see https://www.mass.gov/guides/drinking-water-boil-orders-and-public-health-orders