



# FACT SHEET

Grey Bruce Health Unit, 101 17<sup>th</sup> Street East, Owen Sound, N4K 0A5  
519-376-9420 • www.publichealthgreybruce.on.ca • 1-800-263-3456

## Boil Water Advisory

### What is a Boil Water Advisory (BWA) or Boil Water Order (BWO)?

BWAs and BWOs are public announcements advising the public that they should boil their tap water for drinking and for other uses noted below. They are preventative measures issued to protect public health from waterborne infectious agents that could be or are known to be present in drinking water. There are different reasons for a BWA:

1. **On evidence of conditions, such as:**
  - Unacceptable levels of disease-causing bacteria, viruses, or parasites
  - Unacceptable levels in the cloudiness (turbidity) in the water at its originating source
2. **Precautionary measure** when there is concern that contamination may occur (e.g., local emergency repairs in the distribution system)

The extent of restriction on water use depends on the situation and the reasons for issuing a BWA. Always follow the water system operator and the Health Unit's recommendations on water use.

### Can I make my tap water safe to drink?

Water should be placed in a heat-resistant container or in an electric kettle without an automatic shut-off and brought to a **rolling boil for 1 minute to kill all disease-causing organisms**.

If boiling the water is not possible, it can be disinfected using chlorine (bleach). Add 1/8 teaspoon (or 8 drops; about 0.625 milliliters) of unscented liquid household chlorine (5-6%) bleach for each gallon of clear water (*or 2 drops of bleach for each liter or each quart of water*), stir the mixture well. Let it stand for 30 minutes or longer before you use it.

Refrigerate boiled or treated water until it is used.

### Is it necessary to boil all water in the home during an advisory or order?

During boil water advisories or boil water orders, you should boil all water used for drinking, preparing food, beverages, ice cubes, washing fruits and vegetables, or brushing teeth. Severely immunocompromised individuals should always boil their tap water for the purposes noted above. Infant formulas should be prepared using boiled tap water, at all times.

It is not necessary to boil tap water used for other household purposes, such as showering, laundry, bathing, or washing dishes. Adults, teens, and older children can wash, bathe, or shower; however, they should avoid swallowing the water. Toddlers and infants should be sponge bathed.

### I have a water treatment device; do I still need to boil my drinking water?

If the device is designed to improve the taste and odour or chemical quality of the water, such as activated carbon filters, it is still necessary to boil the water. Devices designed to disinfect the water, such as a UV light units, may be used as an alternative to boiling. If the water is cloudy, filtration may

be required before disinfection. In any case, filters may have to be washed and disinfected or replaced. Check with the manufacturer if you are not certain.

**Can I use the water for hand washing?**

If the boil water order has been issued as a precaution and there is no outbreak of human illness, there is no need for additional hand sanitizing with alcohol based hand rub. If you use an alcohol based hand rub, ensure it contains between 60-90% alcohol (e.g., ethanol, isopropanol).

**How should I wash dishes?**

Your domestic dishwasher may not adequately disinfect the dishes. If dishes are washed by hand, they should be washed and rinsed in hot tap water, then soaked in a dilute solution of household bleach (20 millilitres of bleach in 10 litres of water) for 1 minute, and air dried.

**How should I clean and disinfect my children's toys?**

If the toys are visibly soiled, wash them first with soap and potable water and then disinfect with a freshly prepared bleach solution of 20 ml of regular unscented bleach to 2 litres of water for 2 minutes. This recipe is based on a recipe of 5.25% sodium hypochlorite; check the bottle of bleach to find out the concentration. Cloth and plush toys can be washed by hand or in a washing machine, or dry-cleaned.

**When is a boil water advisory or order lifted?**

Boil water advisories or boil water orders are usually lifted by the responsible authority or water utility when the water is considered safe and no longer poses a threat to public health.

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

The responsible authority or water utility will provide instructions on flushing water pipes within the home. 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 or replaced before being used. Check with the manufacturer for details.

**Reference:**

Health Canada. (2008). *Boil Water Advisories and Boil Water Orders*. Retrieved July 22, 2013 from <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/water-eau/boil-ebullition-eng.php>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2013). *Personal Preparation and Storage of Safe Water*. Retrieved July 22, 2013 from [http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/safe\\_water/personal.html#make\\_safe](http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/safe_water/personal.html#make_safe)