

Frequently Asked Questions about Boiling Water for Emergency Disinfection of Drinking Water

How does boiling make my tap water safe?

Boiling the water kills microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses, or protozoans that can cause disease. Boiling makes the tap water microbiologically safe.

How long should I boil the water?

Bring tap water to a full rolling boil for one minute, and let it cool before using.

Can I boil water in the microwave?

Tap water can be boiled in the microwave in a microwave-safe container, provided that the water reaches a full rolling boil for one minute. Place a microwave-safe utensil in the container to keep the water from superheating (heating above the boiling point without forming steam or bubbles).

Do I have to boil the tap water used to make beverages?

Yes. Boil all of the tap water you use for making coffee, tea, mixed drinks, or any beverage made with water. In addition, all tap water used for making ice for consumption must be boiled.

Should I boil the tap water used to make baby formula?

Yes. Only use boiled tap water or bottled water for mixing formula for your baby.

Do I need to boil water before using it to wash vegetables that will be eaten raw?

Yes. Boil all of the tap water you use for washing raw vegetables.

Do I need to boil the tap water used in cooking?

All tap water used in cooking must first be boiled for one minute, unless the cooking process involves boiling for one minute or more.

Do I have to boil my dish-washing water?

No. Adding a tablespoon of household bleach such as Clorox to a sink full of tap water should be sufficient to treat the water used for washing dishes. Bleach should also be added to the water used for rinsing dishes. Allow dishes and utensils to air dry before reuse.

You may wash dishes in an electric dishwasher, but be sure to use it with its heating element turned on. After washing in an electric dishwasher, dishes should be rinsed in water with a tablespoon of bleach added, and allowed to air dry before reuse.

Should I boil tap water for brushing my teeth?

Yes. Any tap water that might be swallowed should be boiled before use.

Is it necessary to boil water to be used for hand washing? Is any special soap necessary?

No. It is not necessary to boil the tap water used for washing hands, and no special soaps are necessary.

What about my bathwater?

There is no need to boil water for bathing or showering. Adults, teens and older children can shower or bathe, though they should avoid getting water in the mouth or swallowing water. Infants and toddlers should be sponge bathed. No special soaps are necessary.

Care should be taken to prevent water from getting into deep open or post-surgical wounds. Consult your physician or health care provider for wound care instructions.

Do I need to use boiled water for washing clothes or flushing the toilet?

No.

Do I still have to boil tap water if I have a water treatment device?

Yes. Devices designed to improve the taste, odor, or chemical quality of the water, such as activated carbon filters, will not remove harmful microorganisms from the tap water. Boil the tap water to make sure it is safe.

Important Safety Tips

When boiling water on the stovetop, use manageable-sized containers and do not overfill them. Place the container on a rear burner if there are small children in the house. Let the water cool before transferring to another container.