
Food Safety: Safe Drinking Water During A Power Failure

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a healthcare professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

Communal or Municipal Water

During a power failure, the water supplied to your home by your local water utility may no longer be safe to drink without treatment. Pumps used to pressurize water mains may fail and parts of the water treatment plant necessary for water purification may not operate properly. This threatens the safety of the water.

That is why, during power failures, the safety of your water supply must be **confirmed** before using it for drinking, brushing teeth, washing fruits and vegetables, preparing drinks, baby formula or foods that won't be cooked.

It is also important to note that during a power outage, your local water utility may have a limited or reduced supply of water. As a result, you may also be asked to conserve water to prevent severe shortages.

If a **Boil Water Advisory** has been issued by your local health unit, there is likely a problem with the safety of the water. In this case, **do not drink the water**. Use an alternate source of safe water, such as commercially bottled water or follow the instructions below for treating tap water when a Boil Water Advisory has been issued.

How do I know if a Boil Water Advisory has been issued?

A boil water advisory will be communicated by municipal water works officials and the local medical officer of health through the local media. You can also contact your local public health unit for this information.

Treating tap water when a Boil Water Advisory has been issued

When a Boil Water Advisory has been issued, or if you cannot confirm whether a Boil Water Advisory has been issued and are concerned about the safety of the water, use an alternate source of water or treat the water using one of the following methods:

1. Bring the water to a rolling boil for at least **one minute** (water should be bubbling and rolling).

If you are using a gas barbecue to boil water, use it outdoors.

During a power outage, never use gasoline or charcoal-burning devices, such as generators, grills, or camp stoves, inside your home, basement, or garage; or

near a window. Carbon monoxide from these sources can build up in your home and poison the people and animals inside.

2. If water cannot be boiled, add six drops of newly purchased liquid household bleach (unscented, 4-6% chlorine) per gallon (4.55 Litres) of water. Stir well and let the water stand for 30 minutes before using it. If you are going to make infant formula with the water, let the water stand overnight, covered with a clean paper towel or a loose lid, in a cooler or refrigerator before use. This will allow the bleach to do its job and then dissipate so that the bleach does not affect the taste of the formula.
3. You may also use water purification tablets from your local pharmacy to treat tap water. Follow the directions on the label. Let the water stand overnight, uncovered in a cooler or refrigerator, before use. This will allow the purification tablet to do its job and then dissipate before use.

Private Well Water:

If you use the water from your own well, a power outage will normally cause the water pump to fail. Use an alternate source of safe water, such as commercially bottled water or follow the instructions above for treating tap water.

If you have a back-up power generator, use the water as you did before the power failure. Make sure that any water purification system you may use, such as an ultraviolet light, also continues to operate.

Government of Ontario

For information about health services and resources :

www.health.gov.on.ca

For consumer-friendly health tips and information :

www.HealthyOntario.com

INFOline: 1-877-234-4343;

TTY: 1-800-387-5559

Telehealth Ontario:

1-866-797-0000; TTY 1-866-797-0007

INFOline is open during business hours
and can provide general information on healthcare.

Telehealth Ontario is a 24/7 service which uses nurse practitioners to answer your immediate health concerns.