Howard County
Health Department

What to Do During a Boil Water Advisory

A boil water advisory is a health announcement that the public should boil tap water before drinking it. When issued, the public should assume the water is unsafe to drink. The following instructions should be followed for the duration of the boil water advisory.

- **Boil water.** Fill a pot with water and heat until bubbles come from the bottom of the pot to the top. Once the water reaches a rolling boil, boil for 1 minute. Turn off the heat source and let the water cool. Pour the water into a clean, sanitized container with a cover for storage.

- **Disinfect water.** If you are unable to boil your water, disinfect it instead.

    - *If tap water is clear…* Add 1/8 teaspoon (8 drops or about 0.75 milliliters) of unscented household liquid bleach to 1 gallon (16 cups) of water. Mix well and wait 30 minutes or more before drinking. Store disinfected water in a clean, sanitized container with a cover.
    - *If tap water is cloudy…* Filter water using clean cloth. Add 1/4 teaspoon (16 drops or 1.5 milliliters) of unscented household liquid bleach to 1 gallon (16 cups) of water. Mix well and wait 30 minutes or more before drinking. Store disinfected water in a clean, sanitized container with a cover.

- **Sanitize containers.** Make a sanitizing solution by mixing 1 teaspoon (5 milliliters) of unscented household liquid bleach in 1 quart (32 ounces, 4 cups or about 1 liter) of water. Pour this sanitizing solution into a clean storage container and shake well, making sure that the solution coats the entire inside of the container. Let the clean storage container sit at least 30 seconds, and then pour the solution out of the container. Let empty container air dry OR rinse it with clean water that has already been made safe, if available. Never mix bleach with ammonia or other cleaners. Open windows and doors to get fresh air when you use bleach.

- **Water filters.** Boil tap water even if it is filtered. Most kitchen and other household water filters typically ***do not*** remove bacteria or viruses.

- **Preparing and cooking food.** Wash all fruits and vegetables with boiled water that has cooled or bottled water. Bring water to a rolling boil for 1 minute before adding food to cook. Use boiled water when preparing drinks, including coffee, tea and lemonade. Wash food preparation surfaces with boiled water.

- **Feeding babies and using formula.** Continue to breastfeed if possible. If breastfeeding is not an option, use ready-to-use baby formula when available. Prepare powdered or concentrated baby formula with bottled water. Use boiled water if you do not have bottled water. Disinfect water for baby formula if you cannot boil your water. Wash and sterilize bottles and nipples before use. If you cannot sterilize bottles, try to use single-serve, ready-to-feed bottles.

- **Ice.** Do not use ice from ice trays, ice dispensers or ice makers. Throw out all ice made with tap water. Make new ice with boiled or bottled water.

- **Bathing and showering.** Be careful not to swallow any water when bathing or showering. Use caution when bathing babies and young children. Consider giving them a sponge bath to reduce the chance of swallowing water.

- **Brushing teeth.** Brush teeth with boiled or bottled water. Do not use untreated tap water.

- **Washing dishes.** Household dishwashers are generally safe to use if the water reaches a final rinse temperature of at least 150 degrees or if the dishwasher has a sanitizing cycle. To wash dishes by hand, wash and rinse the dishes as you normally would using hot water. In a separate basin, add 1 teaspoon of unscented household liquid bleach for each gallon of warm water. Soak the rinsed dishes in the water for at least one minute. Let the dishes air dry completely.

- **Laundry.** It is safe to do laundry as usual.

- **Pets.** Pets can get some of the same diseases as people. It is a good idea to give them boiled water that has been cooled.

- **After the advisory is lifted…** Run water through all of your taps to flush your faucets. Water dispensers and ice makers in refrigerators also need to be cleaned; follow manufacturer's instructions.

For more information on drinking water safety, visit www.cdc.gov/healthywater.

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Drinking Water Advisory Toolbox, http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/dwa-comm-toolbox/index.html.