



Allegheny County Health Department

Food Safety Program

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Boil Water Advisory Alternative Procedures

A boil water advisory (BWA) is typically issued by the water authority due to presence of microbiological contaminants in the drinking water, which pose a threat to public health and safety. Food facilities may choose to voluntarily close; however, if they choose to remain open, then they must adhere to the following guidelines. Utilizing non-potable water during a BWA may result in an foodborne illness outbreak or enforcement from the Allegheny County Health Department Food Safety Program.

Immediate Actions to Take:

- Any water used from the faucets must be boiled for at least 1 minute for small quantities of water and 3-5 minutes for large quantities of water.
 - Applies to water used for: food preparation/cooking, washing fruits and vegetables, hand washing, ware washing in a 3-bowl sink, and sanitizing buckets
 - Permissible equipment to boil water: stoves, flat tops, tilt skillets, and tilt kettles
- Use an alternative source of water: commercially bottled water or a licensed bulk potable water hauler
- Discard any prepared food and ice made with unpotable water since the issuance of the BWA and if any food or ice prepared or made with unpotable water during the BWA
- **Discontinue the use of:** dishwashers (see more information below), spray misters, coffee makers, soda dispensing machines, drinking fountains, and ice machines

Mandatory Alternative Procedures during the BWA:

- Hand washing – Temporary hand washing set-ups may be utilized with a closed container with a spigot above an existing sink (see picture). Hand sanitizer may be used to supplement hand washing with soap and water.
 - These guidelines must be used for food service employees and recommended for use by patrons in public toilet room settings (see Recommended Alternatives).
- Dishwashers – only use as a prewash step
 - All kitchenware and tableware must be washed, rinsed, and sanitized with properly boiled water.
 - **Note:** Sanitizers in unpotable water are inadequate at minimizing risk during a BWA.
- Use frozen/canned fruits and vegetables or prewashed packaged produce
- Wash fresh produce in boiled or commercially packaged water
- Purchase bagged ice
- Thaw foods only under refrigeration or as part of the cooking process
- Utilize gloves during **all** food handling processes
- Store in-use/serving utensils in foods, or replace/wash, rinse, sanitize and air dry every 4 hours



Recommended Alternatives Procedures during the BWA:

- Limit the menu
- Switch from tableware to disposable products
- Serve only bottled/can beverages
- Hand washing for patrons – may use water from faucets if hand sanitizer available
 - However, hand sanitizer is not 100% effective
 - Recommended to set up hand washing stations for patrons, especially if menu consists of finger food/sandwiches
 - Highly recommended for pre-school-aged children and children likely to eat with their hands
 - A sign stating ‘unpotable water present in toilet room facilities’ may be posted.

Further restrictions and recommendations for everyday activities during a BWA can be found in the *General Guidance for Hospitals & Other Health Care Facilities*.

Recovery Procedures after the Boil Water Advisory:

Once the boil water advisory (BWA) is lifted, complete the following start-up procedures before using water.

- Dispose of all prepared food and ice made while the BWA was in effect
- Flush all water supply lines within the facility, including food processing/cooking equipment, dishwashers, spray misters, coffee makers, soda dispensing machines, drinking fountains, and ice machine connections (see further guidance below)
 - Run **cold** water from the sink furthest from where water enters the building
 - Run the **cold** water until the water temperature stabilizes (until safe water is being drawn from the distribution system and the water in the building has been adequately flushed). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends to flush for 5 minutes.
 - Then, run **cold** water from all other faucets/equipment for at least 1 minute
- Wash, rinse, sanitize and air-dry all contaminated surfaces
- Replace all water filters on any equipment per manufacturer’s instructions
 - Including: ice machine filters, water fountains, beverage units, etc.
- Run water softeners through a regeneration cycle
- Follow manufacturer’s instructions for building water treatment devices
 - Some devices may need to be disinfected and flushed and/or replaced

Ice Machine Start-up Procedures:

Follow manufacturer’s recommended cleaning procedures, or:

- Properly flush the ice machine water supply line per instructions above
- Flush the water lines in the machine
- Replace the ice machine filter per manufacturer’s instructions
- Turn the machine on and make at least one batch of ice
- Remove and dispose of the ice
- Wash, rinse, sanitize and air-dry all surfaces on the inside of the bin

Once the above steps are completed, the ice machine may be used as usual.