

# COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT DRINKING WATER ADVISORIES

## WHEN A DRINKING WATER ADVISORY HAS BEEN ISSUED

### Why is a drinking water advisory issued?

- A drinking water advisory is issued when the Ontario Drinking Water Standards are not met.
- A drinking water advisory is based on conditions that cannot be corrected by boiling the water.

The extent of restriction on water use depends on the situation and the reason for issuing the advisory. Always follow the Health Unit's recommendations on water use.

### What is the difference between a boil water advisory and a drinking water advisory?

A **drinking water advisory** is issued when a condition exists in a drinking water supply that cannot be corrected by boiling the water or by disinfection. This condition may result in a risk to consumers. A **boil water advisory** is issued when a condition exists that can be corrected by boiling the water before consuming it.

### How do I use water when a drinking water advisory has been issued?

The water may be used for laundry and bathing (excluding small children) but **should NOT be used for drinking, making juice and infant formula, cooking, making ice, washing uncooked fruits and vegetables, or brushing teeth**. For these purposes, water from an alternate source, such as bottled water, should be used.

### Where can I get water?

Bottled water can be purchased from local suppliers such as grocery stores, convenience stores and some department stores.

### Can I take a bath?

Adults and teens may shower with untreated water as long as no water is swallowed. Younger children should be sponge-bathed instead of bathed in a tub because they may swallow tub water. Older children could also be given a shower with a hand-held showerhead, avoiding the face.

## **How can I disinfect a container for storing drinking water during a drinking water advisory?**

Clean the container with hot soapy water to remove grease or any other matter which may still be in the container.

Rinse the container with clean water from an alternate source to remove soap. Get water from a tap that is not affected by the drinking water advisory.

Mix two tablespoons of household bleach with one gallon (4.54 litres) of water from an alternate source in a container with a tight-fitting lid to ensure approximately 200 ppm of chlorine is present. Shake the container for at least one minute. You may also use an alternate disinfectant such as quaternary ammonium (available at restaurant supply stores) or iodine. Follow the manufacturer's instructions concerning the mixture of quaternary ammonium and iodine. Use the same solution to disinfect the cap, lid, and mouth of the container. Empty the container and let air dry.

Protect the container from re-contamination:

- avoid touching the mouth, cap, or lid of the container,
- keep the container away from surfaces such as floors,
- replace the lid,
- before re-filling with drinking water from an alternate source, clean and disinfect the container using one of the solutions above.

## **Is it okay to wash my dishes?**

You should not wash your dishes until after the drinking water advisory has been lifted. If possible, use disposable dishware and utensils, or use water from an alternate source.

## **Can I do laundry?**

Yes, but you should be aware that tap water may discolour your clothing.

## **Is tap water safe to fill wading pools for children?**

No, tap water is not safe to use in wading pools because small children may get water in their mouth, providing a possibility for infection.

## **Are there precautions for day care centres?**

Stop the use of water play tables during this time. Drain all water play tables or play areas containing water. Avoid activities/crafts which use water and where there is a risk that children may consume a product (e.g., hand painting, baking, pasting with glue made from flour and water).

## **Should I test my water?**

If you use water from the municipal system, do **NOT** take water samples to the Health Unit for testing. The municipal water supply is routinely tested by your municipality.

## **I have a water filtration device. Does this make the water safe for drinking or cooking?**

No. The water should not be used for drinking, cooking, making juice and infant formula, making ice, washing uncooked fruits and vegetables, or brushing teeth until further notice. Use water from an alternate source for these purposes.

## **My doctor told me I am immunocompromised. What should I do?**

Always follow the advice of your physician or dietitian. You might be advised to use water from an alternate source, even when a drinking water advisory has not been issued.

## **How does the medical officer of health decide when to lift a drinking water advisory?**

The Ontario Drinking Water Standards (ODWS) state that the medical officer of health should continue the drinking water advisory until two consecutive sets of samples taken from all parts of the water system show that the standards in the ODWS have been met.

## **How can I get more information?**

Contact the Health Unit at 705-474-1400 or 1-800-563-2808 and ask to speak to a public health inspector.