

Water Boil Order Frequently Asked Questions

Q1 – Why was a boil water order issued for my water?

A boil water order has been issued by the City of Libby as a precaution to protect consumers from drinking water that may have been contaminated with disease causing organisms (also called pathogens). The flooding event has impacted the surface water feeding into the water treatment plant resulting in high levels of turbidity. This high turbidity exceeds the water treatment plant's ability to process the city's drinking water, increasing the possibility of contaminants in the system.

Q2 – How long will the need to boil water continue?

The boil order is likely to remain in place for the rest of the week. City and County officials will advise you when it is safe to return to normal water use.

Q3 – How do I boil my water to make it safe to drink?

Bring cold tap water to a full rolling boil for 3 minutes and then allow the boiled water to cool before use. Store the cooled boiled water in a clean container with a lid or cover. Because it may take 20 or 30 minutes to fully cool, plan ahead. Make a number of batches of boiled water in advance that is sufficient to meet your demands so you will not need to use it hot and risk scalds or burns.

Q4 – Can I use tap water to brush my teeth?

No. Use boiled water that has been cooled or bottled water to brush your teeth.

Q5 – Can I use the tap water for hand washing, bathing, and shaving?

Your water may be used by healthy individuals for showering, bathing, and, washing, so long as care is taken not to swallow the water. Children and disabled individuals should have their bathing supervised to ensure water is not ingested. Sponge bathing may be advisable, to further reduce the potential for ingestion. The time spent bathing should be minimized. Though the risk of illness is small, individuals with open wounds, blisters/sores, recent surgical wounds, are immunocompromised, or are suffering from chronic illness may want to consider using boiled water (then cooled) or water from an acceptable alternate source for bathing, skin cleansing, and shaving until the boil water notice is lifted.

Q6 – What infectious organisms might be present in contaminated water?

There are many possible waterborne pathogens. The organisms of concern in this area include protozoa such as *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium*; bacteria such as *E. coli* and species of *Shigella*, *Salmonella*, *Vibrio*, *Camphylobacter*; and viruses such as Hepatitis A,

Adenoviruses, Hepatitis E, Enteroviruses, Rotaviruses and Caliciviruses. These organisms primarily affect the gastrointestinal system, causing diarrhea, abdominal cramps, nausea, and vomiting with or without fever. Sometimes these illnesses are contracted by ingesting contaminated water, and in some circumstances skin contact could also lead to infection. Most of these illnesses are not usually serious or life threatening except in the elderly, the very young, or those who are immune compromised.

Q7 – What if I have a water filter installed on my tap?

Water filters typically don't filter out all disease-causing organisms. Boil the filtered water or use bottled water.

Q8 – What should I do about preparing food and beverages?

Use boiled water that has been cooled or bottled water to cook food and to prepare drinks such as coffee, tea, and lemonade.

Q9 – What if I have already consumed potentially contaminated water?

If someone has consumed potentially contaminated water from a public water system, or even from their own private well, the likelihood of becoming ill is low. However, illness is certainly possible, especially for people that have chronic illness or may be immunocompromised. This is why boil water orders are issued. Anyone experiencing symptoms of gastroenteritis, such as nausea, vomiting, and abdominal cramps, with or without fever should seek medical attention. These symptoms are not unique to exposure to potential contaminants/organisms in the water, and the lab is the only way to doctor's involvement is key to identifying the cause of your illness. If your doctor suspects a waterborne illness, you may be asked to provide blood and/or stool samples.

Q10 – What should I do about washing fruit and vegetables and food preparation surfaces?

Use boiled water that has been cooled or bottled water to wash fruit and vegetables and food preparation surfaces.

Q11 – Can I use my ice?

Bagged or prepackaged ice made from a potable water source that is not under a boil water order may be used. Ice from your ice maker may be used if it can be positively confirmed that it was all made well in advance of the boil water order. Any ice made since the boil water notice was issued and any ice whose age is uncertain must not be consumed or used in food preparation.

Q12 - What should I do about preparing baby formula?

Use ready-to-use baby formula if possible. If powdered or concentrated baby formula is used, prepare with bottled water or cooled boiled water.

Q13 – Should I give my pet boiled water?

Yes. Pets can get sick from the same contaminants as people. It is a good idea to give them boiled water that has been cooled or bottled water.

Q14 – How should I wash dishes during a boil water advisory?

Use disposable plates, cups, and utensils if possible. Household dishwashers are safe to use, set your dishwasher so it uses a hot water rinse or sanitizing cycle if possible. To wash dishes by hand, wash the dishes using dish detergent and hot water then rinse with boiled or bottled water. Let the dishes air dry completely before using them again.

Q15 – Can I use hand sanitizing lotion or wipes?

Sanitizing wipes can certainly be used and are encouraged but these are generally not as effective as proper hand washing with soap and water. Alcohol based sanitizers work against many common disease causing agents (*E. coli*, *Salmonella*, and *Campylobacter*), but may not be effective for *Cryptosporidium* and some bacteria spores. It is recommended that sanitizing wipes be accompanied by an ample supply of boiled or bottled water for washing with your regular hand soap.

Q16 – Can I use the tap water for washing clothes/linens?

Yes, unless a “Do Not Use” notification is issued, it is safe to wash clothes and linens in tap water as long as the clothes are completely dried with heat before being used. However, the increased turbidity from the flooding may discolor items.

Q17 – Does a boil water notice affect the use of my toilet?

There is no need to disinfect water used for flushing. Unless a “Do Not Use” notice is issued, there is no restriction or concern about using your toilet.

Q18 – Is safe to water my garden and house plants?

Yes, you can use tap water for watering the garden and house plants.

Q19 – Is safe to let my children play in a kiddie pool or bathtub filled with tap water?

No. Due to the high chance that children will get water in their mouth while playing, we recommend that you avoid using your kiddie pool or bathtub during the boil water order.

Q20 – Is it safe to drink water from my well?

Wells that were submerged or in close proximity to flood waters should be tested and treated. Shallow wells are also vulnerable to contamination. To be safe, drink bottled water or boil your well water prior to consumption. If you have a specific question regarding your well, please email the county sanitarian (r.blumberg@libby.org).

Q21– Is it safe to use bottled water?

It is safe to use bottled water that is certified for sale in Montana. Such water may be used for drinking, cooking, and washing with no further treatment. Bottled water may be preferable when boiling is not possible or is inconvenient.

Q22 – What is the shelf life/expiration date for bottled water?

Many manufacturers advise a two-year period for taste, but bottled water can be used indefinitely if stored properly. The International Bottled Water Association advises consumers to store bottled water at room temperature (or cooler), out of direct sunlight and away from solvents and chemicals such as gasoline, paint thinners, and dry-cleaning chemicals.