

BOIL WATER NOTICES

Checklist for Hospitals and Other Resident Medical Facilities

When a boil water event occurs at a hospital or other resident medical facility*, there is a potential for exposure to water borne pathogens. Medical professionals must ensure that patients, staff, and the public are protected and must take every appropriate precaution to eliminate possible exposures. Listed below are actions that will help you to control exposures **.

Before a boil water event, review and update your emergency response plan:

- Update contact lists for personnel and organizations.
- Use standard infection control practices and work with facility engineering and maintenance staff to identify all routes of exposure to tap water for patients, visitors and staff. Develop standard procedures to control these exposures.
- Identify all procedures, appliances, tanks, equipment, etc. that use tap water, especially where tap water is used for patient care, medical processes, sanitizing, preparing solutions, preparing food and beverages, etc.. If you provide any supplemental water treatment at your facility, discuss the adequacy of this treatment with your local Health Department.
- Prepare to meet your water needs. Determine in advance how much water you will need, where you will need it, how you will prepare it or where you will get it. Keep an emergency supply of bottled water on site.
- Develop standard procedures for restoring water use once the boil water event has been resolved. Medical facilities have unique equipment and complex plumbing that will require special attention for flushing and disinfection.

During a boil water event, do not use tap water without appropriate precautions:

- Check and follow your emergency response plan.
- The recommended treatment for tap water during a boil water event is to bring water to a full rolling boil for 1 minute, then cool before use. This may take 20-30 minutes, plan ahead.
- Do not use tap water for: drinking, mixing oral solutions, contact with open wounds or sores, internal treatment or contact within body cavities, patient rinsing, or hand washing. Use boiled water, bottled water, or water from a safe alternate source**.
- Identify and control (shut off, bag or post signs) all locations where people can obtain tap water to ingest: water fountains, sinks, spigots, ice machines, etc. Provide drinking water (boiled or bottled) at convenient locations.
- If your facility provides food service, you must protect your patients, customers and staff from the exposures posed by this service. For additional details please refer to the handouts for Food Service Establishments.
- Provide boiled or bottled water in restrooms for patients, visitors, and staff. Although under ordinary circumstances alcohol-based hand sanitizers are an effective and acceptable method

of hand decontamination when hands are not visibly soiled, washing hands with soap (non-antimicrobial or antimicrobial) and clean, warm water is the preferred method for hand hygiene after using the restroom.

- Make sure patients and staff on all shifts are aware and understand what to do.
- Any ice made or mixed with ice made since the boil water event began should not be consumed. If age of ice is uncertain, label it unsafe for consumption and if it does not have a critical use, such as cooling medication or food, discard it. Disconnect the ice machine.
- Any solution or equipment prepared with water during or just prior to the boil water event should be evaluated before use.
- Adjust or eliminate procedures that are hard to perform with limited water. If appropriate, switch to an acceptable water treatment procedure or an acceptable alternate water supply**. Also consider packaged ice from a safe alternate source.
- Some medical equipment provides additional treatment of tap water that may be sufficient to operate without boiling water, but many forms of water treatment may not provide adequate protection*. Refer to manufacturer's specifications and consult with your local Health Department and your technical staff before relying on this treatment during a boil water event.
- Tap water can be used to wash floors and walls and to flush toilets, but should not be used for sanitary surfaces.
- Tap water can be used to wash clothes and linens, as long as they are completely dried with heat before being used.

After the boil water event is over, facility personnel must take appropriate steps to ensure that the facility water system, plumbing and equipment connected to it are all free of contamination. Some actions that will help you restore normal water use include:

- Flush **all** water lines. A general flushing recommendation is at least 15 minutes at each tap. Your facilities engineer should be able to advise you on a flushing time appropriate for the layout and complexity of your facility. Then wash sinks, fountains, faucets and spigots with a hospital grade disinfectant.
- Appliances, such as your water heater, water filters and water tanks, should also be flushed of at least one tank volume. Water filters should be replaced or have the filter media backwashed per the manufacturer's recommendations.
- All potentially affected equipment that uses tap water, such as your medical equipment, solution machines, beverage machines, dishwasher, and ice machines, should be flushed and disinfected per the manufacturer's recommendations. This should include dedicated water lines and tubing. Run equipment through a full cycle and flush contents to waste.
- Sanitary surfaces, patient contact surfaces, surfaces that will come into contact with utensils and medical tools, and ice bins should be cleaned with a hospital-grade disinfectant solution.

* Boil water events may result from a boil water notice or advisory issued by a public water utility or from a boil water order issued by the local Health Department to a medical facility that runs its own water supply. A boil water event may also be initiated voluntarily by a medical facility in response to water quality concerns that arise at the facility. In the event of a "Do Not Use" order or notice, additional precautions will be needed. The information in this checklist is intended to help regulated facilities deal with boil water events, and does not revise or supersede any applicable regulations or permit requirements.

** For additional information, including alternate water sources and alternate water treatments see the Frequently Asked Questions for Hospitals and Other Resident Medical Facilities or contact your local Health Department representative.