

Boil Water Alerts and food businesses

Background

Boil Water Alerts are issued when there is a potential concern with the safety of the water. These alerts can often be precautionary and this will be communicated by the Department of Health when they are issued.

Separate advice is provided as part of a Boil Water Alert relating to general household use of water. However, it is noted that the impact on a food business is different and the risk depends on the type of food handling and preparation you undertake.

During a Boil Water Alert, the water from the tap may still be used for some activities in your business. The concern relates to consumption of the water, whether this is through drinking it directly, or consuming as an ingredient in food.

How long do I need to boil the water?

Bring water to a full rolling boil until a continuous and rapid stream of air-bubbles is produced in your pan or kettle. After boiling, allow the water to cool.

Water should be boiled even if it has a filter installed.

Is there an alternative to boiling the water?

You can use bottled water.

What activities in my business do I need to use boiled water for?

Boiled water needs to be used where the water will be consumed without a boiling step in the preparation process. This includes:

- Consumption as drinking water (by staff or customers).
- Preparing beverages or foods where water is not heated. i.e. cordial, jelly, making ice.
- Preparing beverages or foods where water is heated but not boiled.
- Soaking or rinsing salads and ingredients that are ready-to-eat i.e. lettuce, spinach for salads, or herbs that are used as garnishes.

What activities can I undertake in my business using the water from the tap without boiling?

The following activities present minimal chance of the water being consumed:

- Preparing beverages or foods where water is boiled i.e. tea, instant coffee, instant noodles or making soups, broths or curries.
- Soaking or rinsing vegetables that will be cooked i.e. potatoes, broccoli.
- Hand washing.
- Cleaning of equipment.
- Cleaning of food contact surfaces. (Assuming a sanitising step is also carried out)
- Diluting chemicals for cleaning and sanitising.

Can I use my coffee machine?

For domestic style coffee machines that require manual filling with water, this water should be boiled and cooled prior to filling the machine.

For commercial coffee machines that are plumbed into the water mains, the internal heating system of the machine preheats the water to a very high temperature and should achieve the same outcome as boiling the water.

Is instant hot water from a zip/billi tap safe to use?

Hot water from these taps designed for instant coffees and tea, reach a very high temperature and should achieve the same outcome as boiling the water.

Note that the cold tap on these systems should not be used during the Boil Water Alert.

How do I boil large volumes of water for use in my food business?

Depending on your type of food handling you may use larger volumes of water than can be boiled in a domestic kettle. Stove top boiling of water in large pots and saucepans may be a more practical option for food businesses.

Cool rooms are a good option for cooling boiled water in large quantities for use in your food business.

Always take care and safety precautions when handling large quantities of boiling water.

I am on a private bore water supply does this affect my business?

No. The Boil Water Alert relates to the reticulated town supply of water. If you use water in your business from a private bore or another private water supply, this advice will not apply to you, unless floodwater has impacted your bore or supply.

More information

For more information, you can speak with an Environmental Health Officer by e-mailing envirohealth@nt.gov.au or call 8922 7377.