



In CONTROL Fact Sheet

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Suggested Procedures for Dental Offices During Boil-Water Advisories

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Division of Oral Health suggests that the following procedures may be appropriate for dental offices during boil-water advisories. These procedures should be observed in addition to specific instructions issued by state or local health departments during these advisories.

What is a boil-water advisory?

A boil-water advisory is a statement to the public advising persons to boil tap water before drinking it. Advisories can be issued after 1) failure of or substantial interruption in water treatment processes that result in increased turbidity levels or particle counts and mechanical or equipment failure; 2) positive test results for pathogens (e.g., *Cryptosporidium*, *Giardia*, or *Shigella*) in water; 3) violations of the total coliform rule or the turbidity standard of the surface water treatment rule; 4) circumstances that compromise the distribution system (e.g., watermain break) coupled with an indication of a health hazard; or 5) a natural disaster (e.g., flood, hurricane, or earthquake).



What should be done when a boil-water advisory is in effect?

While a boil-water advisory is in effect

- Water from the public water system should not be delivered to patients through the dental unit, ultrasonic scaler, or other dental equipment that uses the public water system until the boil-water advisory is canceled. This restriction does not apply if the water source is isolated from the municipal water system (e.g., a separate water reservoir or other water treatment device cleared for marketing by the Food and Drug Administration).
- Water from the public water system should not be used for the dilution of any liquid germicides until the boil-water advisory is canceled.
- Patients should not use water from the public water system for rinsing but should use water from alternative sources (e.g., bottled or distilled water) or tap water that has been brought to a rolling boil for at least one minute and cooled prior to use.
- Dental personnel should not use water from the public water supply for hand washing. Instead, antimicrobial-containing products that do not require water for use, such as alcohol-based hand rubs, can be used until the boil-water notice is canceled. If hands are visibly contaminated, bottled water and soap should be used for handwashing; if bottled water is not immediately available, an antiseptic towelette should be used.



What should I do when the boil-water advisory is canceled?

- First, incoming waterlines from the public water system inside the dental office should be flushed (i.e., cleared of contaminated water). Flush all faucets in the dental office and waterlines to dental equipment that use the public water system. The local water utility should provide guidance for proper waterline flushing to reduce residual microbial contamination in the lines. There is no consensus as to the optimal duration for flushing procedures following the cancellation of the boil-water advisory. A review of the literature found that the time period recommended for flushing waterlines, following the cancellation of a boil-water advisory, varied anywhere from 1 to 5 minutes. The length of time may vary with the type and length of the plumbing system leading to the office.
- After the incoming public water system lines are flushed, dental unit waterlines should be cleaned according to the manufacturer's instructions.



References and Additional Resources:

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