

Water, Sanitation, & Hygiene (WASH)-related Emergencies & Outbreaks



Making Water Safe in an Emergency

In an emergency, water contaminated with germs can often be made safe to drink by boiling, adding disinfectants, or filtering.

IMPORTANT: Water contaminated with fuel or toxic chemicals will not be made safe by boiling or disinfection. Use bottled water or a different source of water if you know or suspect that your water might be contaminated with fuel or toxic chemicals.

In emergency situations, use bottled water if possible; bottled water is the safest choice for drinking and all other uses. If bottled water is not available, the following methods can help make your water safe to drink.

*Note: These methods are listed in order of what is most effective at making your water safe.

1. Boiling

If you don't have safe bottled water, you should **boil your water** to make it safe to drink. Boiling is the surest method to kill disease-causing organisms, including viruses, bacteria, and parasites.

You can improve the flat taste of boiled water by pouring it from one container to another and then allowing it to stand for a few hours, OR by adding a pinch of salt for each quart or liter of boiled water.

If the water is cloudy:

1. Filter it through a clean cloth, paper towel, or coffee filter OR allow it to settle.
2. Draw off the clear water.
3. Bring the clear water to a rolling boil for 1 minute (at elevations above 6,500 feet, boil for three minutes).
4. Let the boiled water cool.
5. Store the boiled water in **clean sanitized containers** with tight covers.

If the water is clear:

1. Bring the clear water to a rolling boil for 1 minute (at elevations above 6,500 feet, boil for three minutes).
2. Let the boiled water cool.
3. Store the boiled water in **clean sanitized containers** with tight covers.