



DRINKING WATER QUALITY

Fact Sheet

Clean and safe water is important for our health and wellbeing. When the water in our homes is poor, this can have major impacts on our health.

Since 2006, the government of Canada has been making it a priority to improve the drinking water in First Nations communities and it continues to do so with a 330 million dollar budget for the next few years. In the meantime, there are still many communities (92 as of April 18, 2008) that have long-term water advisories. Respecting these advisories is one of the things that you can do to protect yourself and your family. Here is some information to help you.

WHERE DO CONTAMINANTS IN OUR WATER COME FROM?

- ❖ Naturally-occurring chemicals (such as arsenic and asbestos).
- ❖ Natural and industrial radioactive materials (such as radon).
- ❖ Synthetic chemicals from industrial effluents and emissions.
- ❖ Contaminants such as trihalomethanes may also be formed during the process of water chlorination or other treatment processes if not properly done.
- ❖ Substances such as lead and copper may leach from the water pipings.

DRINKING WATER ADVISORIES

Drinking water advisories, sometimes called drinking water orders, are given as preventative measures to protect you from being contaminated from the drinking water. Also, advisories still apply if you have water filters to improve taste, smell and/or chemical quality of the water. If there are no advisories, your tap water is safe to drink.

ONCE A DRINKING WATER ADVISORY HAS BEEN LIFTED

Specific instructions will be given to you by the responsible authority. This may include instructions on flushing water pipes, disinfecting water heaters and/or using a water disinfection treatment in your home but whatever instructions are given, it is important to follow them carefully.

Types of Advisories

	BOIL WATER ADVISORIES OR ORDERS	“DO NOT DRINK” ADVISORIES OR ORDERS
WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?	You need to boil the tap water for 1 minute (make sure it is a rolling boil) before drinking it and before using it for things like preparing food, beverages, ice cubes, washing fruits and vegetables, or brushing teeth. This is common in First Nations communities, especially those that are small and remote.	You should not drink the tap water at all but instead you should use other sources of water like bottled water for drinking and for other uses.
WHEN ARE THESE ADVISORIES GIVEN?	When there are too many disease-causing bacteria, viruses or parasites in the water system anywhere from the source to the tap and/or when turbidity (too many particles floating around) is too high or as a precaution if repairs are being made to the water system.	When the contamination present in the water cannot be killed by boiling water or as a precaution if repairs are being made to the water system.
WHEN DOES THIS HAPPEN?	When there is inadequate filtration and/or disinfection during the water treatment or because of a re-contamination during the water distribution.	



First Nations Environmental Health Innovation Network

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SYMPTOMS

WHAT CAN HAPPEN IF I DRINK CONTAMINATED WATER?

Nausea Fever Diarrhea Hepatitis

TREATMENT

If you feel sick and you think that it is because of the water that you drank, it is a good idea to keep a water sample of what you drank and see a doctor or nurse as soon as possible.

PREVENTION

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY?

- ❖ Follow the advisories very closely.
- ❖ Follow the instructions once advisories have been lifted very closely.
- ❖ Purchase a charcoal home filter if you can afford it.
- ❖ Most of the home filters are used to improve the taste and smell of the water but the carbon type filters may also help in removing some parasites found in the water.
- ❖ If you have a home water reservoir, clean it regularly by disinfecting the walls of the tank with bleach.

SOURCES OF DRINKING WATER TAP WATER

A municipal system or a treatment plant (delivered in home reservoirs or directly connected to a water and sewage system)

NATURAL SOURCES

Lakes, rivers, streams, melted snow or ice
(See fact sheet on “Outdoor Drinking Water Quality”)

BOTTLED WATER

Non-flavoured (choose most often) or flavoured

FOR MORE INFORMATION

You can contact your local public health unit or contact Health Canada at: E-mail: water_eau@hc-sc.gc.ca or write to:

Water Quality and Health Bureau
Healthy Environments and Consumer Safety
Branch
Health Canada,
Sir Charles Tupper Building,
2720 Riverside Drive (A.L. 6604B),
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9

How should tap water be boiled properly?

- Place hot water in a heat-resistant container or in an electric kettle without an automatic shut-off
- Water can also be boiled in a microwave-safe container, but if so: Include a glass rod or a plastic stir stick in the container to prevent the formation of superheated water (water heated above its boiling point, without the formation of steam).
- Bring to a rolling boil for 1 minute (add 1 minute for each 300m or 1000ft above sea level)
- Cool and pour it into a clean container
- Refrigerate until you are ready to use it
- Keep it no longer than 2 days

Call us Toll-Free at 1-866-960-5223 for more environmental health resources.

The information given has been adapted from the following sites and documents:

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada:
[Government Of Canada Announces Next Important Steps To Improve Drinking Water In First Nations Communities](#)

Health Canada documents:
[Drinking Water Advisories](#)

[Guidelines for Canadian Drinking Water Quality - Summary Table](#)

[Procedure for Addressing Drinking Water Advisories in First Nations Communities South of 60°](#)

[Guidance for Issuing and Rescinding Boil Water Advisories](#)

[Disinfecting private wells](#)
[Canadian Drinking Water Guideline](#)

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