

Ensuring safe drinking water

Fact sheet

Having access to adequate supplies of safe drinking water during and immediately after a disaster is one of the most important parts of protecting your health. However, drinking water supplied by your local council or your water utility may not be available or safe to drink after a disaster. As a result, you should include adequate supplies of safe drinking water in your emergency kit. If you haven't prepared adequate supplies of safe drinking water, the following information can help you treat water to ensure its safety.

During and immediately following a disaster

Local councils and water utilities have an obligation to alert the public if they know or suspect the safety of the water has been compromised as a result of a disaster. Listen to your local radio and TV station or check your local council's website (if possible) for updates on the water supply. It is important that any advice provided through these channels is followed.

Make water safe

If your local council or water utility knows or suspects drinking the water might make you sick because of disease-causing microbes they will advise you to boil the water before consumption. Water should be brought to the boil and then allowed to cool, before being stored in clean, covered containers before use.

Take care when boiling water as it can scald. It is safest to boil water using an electric kettle. If you have lost electric power water can be boiled, using a saucepan, on a gas stove, barbeque or portable gas cooker. Always take care when boiling in pots and pans, particularly if you have young children or vulnerable people in your household. Keep pan handles turned inward so children cannot reach them. The use of bottled water is another safe alternative. Use cooled, boiled water or bottled water for

- drinking
- preparing baby formula
- hand washing
- preparing food and cooking
- brushing teeth
- bathing infants
- making ice.

Dirty dishes should be washed in hot soapy water, rinsed in hot water and left to completely air-dry before using again. You don't need boiled water for toilet flushing and clothes washing.

Water contaminated by chemicals (including fuels) will not be made safe by boiling. Use a different source of water if you know or suspect that water might be contaminated.

Further information

- Department of Health <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/disaster>
- Disaster Management <http://www.disaster.qld.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>
- Contact 13 QGOV (13 74 68) for your nearest Public Health Unit