

General Advice for Food Business and Childcare Operators experiencing disruption to drinking water supplies

PLEASE TAKE HEED OF ANY INFORMATION ISSUED BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITY OR HEALTH SERVICE EXECUTIVE WHICH IS SPECIFIC TO THE ONGOING WATER SUPPLY ISSUE IN YOUR AREA.

A potable supply of water must be provided in all food premises as required by European Communities Hygiene of Foodstuffs 2006. A potable water supply means a water supply that is suitable for drinking purposes or for use in connection with food or food equipment. The suitability of a water supply for this purpose is set out in the standards required by Council Directive 98/83/EC on the quality of water intended for human consumption.

It is the responsibility of the food business/childcare operator to ensure that food prepared and/ or served in their premises does not put the health of the public at risk. Whilst the precautions below outline some of the ways that this can be avoided ultimately food business operators need to assess the risk in their own food premises and in so doing may need to decide to reduce or cease trading for the duration of the disruption to the water supply.

HSE Environmental Health Officers will continue to work with the food business and childcare operators in affected areas in this regard.

PRECAUTIONS FOR THOSE OPERATING FOOD BUSINESSES

Ensure that all water used for food preparation and consumption is from a supply that is from an approved and safe source. Disused private wells should not be used until the water has been tested and deemed satisfactory.

PRECAUTIONS WITH EMERGENCY WATER SUPPLIES

- Emergency water supplies may be provided through tankers in some affected areas.
- When availing of Emergency Water supplies people are asked to bring their own containers for water collection. It is important to ensure your water container is clean before it is filled. A sanitizer can be used to clean containers. Please follow manufacturer's instructions.
- Containers that have been previously used to store chemicals should not be used for the transportation or storage of water.
- You are advised to bring this tanker water to a rolling boil for one minute before use (this applies to both drinking water and water used for food preparation).
- All water for drinking and food preparation (with the exception of bottled waters) should be brought to the boil and then allowed to cool before using.

Please remember the following important points,

1. Only boiled or bottled water should preferably be used for food preparation.
2. If you have any doubt about the water supply that is available or if it is subject to an official Boil Water Notice, this water if intended for use for direct drinking purposes must be boiled before use. After the water is boiled, if it is not for use immediately it must be kept in suitable clean containers and protected from risk of contamination. Please note boiled water cannot be kept indefinitely.
3. Ice must only be made from boiled or bottled water.
4. Equipment, worktops, chopping boards, or other surfaces that come into direct or indirect contact with food must be cleaned and sanitised using this supplied water that has been boiled before use or bottled water.
5. Areas that do not come in contact with foodstuffs can be cleaned using any tank water supplied without it having to be boiled.
6. The use of disposable utensils e.g. paper plates, cups etc is also recommended as a short term measure to reduce the need for washing up.
7. Suitable antibacterial soap or hand sanitizer must be used for the washing of hands at all wash hand basins in the premises including those for customer use.
8. Foodworkers/childcare workers should ensure that they wash their hands frequently; if no tap water is available they should use the water supply from water tankers if available, bottled water or hand wipes/sanitizers.
9. Provision of water must also be supplied for the efficient use of toilet and wash hand basin facilities.
10. Please note in some instances at the initial stages of a disruption to the mains water supply, stored water may still be available to wash hand basins; this water must NOT be used for drinking, ice or food preparation purposes.

ADDITIONAL PRECAUTIONS FOR THOSE OPERATING CHILDCARE SERVICES

All of the above issues also apply in these settings however the following precautions should also be followed.

Bottle feeding for babies

In preparing formula feeds for infants / babies, it is advisable to use water from one of the water tankers in the designated areas, or bottled water brought to a 'rolling' boil and left covered to cool for no more than half an hour. Then follow the manufacturer's instructions on making up the feed.

Use cooled boiled water or bottled water for cooling the feed once it has been made up. Ready-to-feed liquid formula may be used instead.

Bottled waters should comply with all drinking water standards and will be safe to use in preparing baby feed. If you are using bottled water for preparing baby food, be aware that some natural mineral water may have high sodium content. Look at the label for sodium or 'Na' and check its level is not higher than 200mg per litre. If the content is higher, then it is advisable to use a different type of bottled water. If no other water is available, then use this water for as short a time as possible. It is important to keep babies hydrated.

Sterilising Feeding Equipment.

Depending on which method of sterilisation you use always ensure that the water used is safe.

Tanker water should be brought to a rolling boil for one minute and cooled. This cooled water can be then be used in steam sterilisers or cold water sterilisation systems. Bottled water can also be used for these purposes.

Boiling is another method of sterilising baby bottles. All the bottle-feeding items need to be boiled for a minimum of 10 minutes. You must have a separate pan, only for the purpose of boiling these items.

Again once you have brought the tanker water or stored tap water to a rolling boil for 1 minute the feeding items can then be submerged in this pan and boiled for a further 10 minutes.

Always wash you hands before removing any sterilised equipment

Bathing

If tap water is not available for bathing infants, boiled and **cooled** tanker water or bottled water are safe alternatives. Another safe alternative to bathing is to use baby wipes for hand cleansing and washing infants. Similar advice applies to older children and adults.

If you have any questions on the above please contact your local HSE EHO Department.

Details on www.hse.ie