

Fact Sheet: Drinking Water Safety during an Emergency

During an emergency, adequate drinking water becomes a necessity. During emergencies you may not be able to obtain water and food. During emergencies your home food and water supplies may be damaged, deteriorated, or destroyed. Floods, hurricanes, power outages and other disasters may cause extensive disruptions in every day lifestyles. Consider these recommendations when preparing for an emergency.

Storing water

Store water in plastic, glass, fiberglass or enamel lined containers. Never use a container that has held toxic substances. You can also purchase food grade plastic buckets or drums. Seal water containers tightly and store in a cool, dark place. Rotate water every six months.

Sources of water

If you do not have access to a supply of clean water, you can use the water in your hot-water tank and pipes. As a last resort, you can use water in the reservoir tank of your toilet (not the bowl). If you need to find water outside of your home, you can consider the following sources: rainwater streams, rivers, ponds, streams, lakes and natural springs. Avoid all water with floating materials, odor or dark color. Use saltwater only if it is first distilled. You should not drink flood water.

Purifying water

You should treat all water of uncertain purity before using it for drinking, food preparation or hygiene. Before treating, let any suspended particles settle to the bottom or strain them through layers of paper towel or clean cloth.

Boiling: Boiling is the safest method of treating water. Bring water to a rolling boil for 3-5 minutes. Boiled water will taste better if you put oxygen back into it by pouring the water back and forth between two clean containers. This will also improve the taste of stored water.

Disinfect: You can use household liquid bleach to kill microorganisms. Use only regular household bleach that contains 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite. Do not use scented bleach, color safe bleaches or bleaches with added cleaners. Other chemicals, such as iodine or water treatment products sold in camping or surplus stores that do not contain 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite as the only active ingredient, are not recommended and should not be used. Add 16 drops of bleach per gallon of water, stir, and let stand for 30 minutes. If the water does not have a slight bleach odor, repeat the dosage and let stand for another 15 minutes.

For more information please contact the Food Safety and Hygiene Inspection Services Division at (202) 535-2180



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