DOH Fact Sheet: Drinking Water Safety during an Emergency

During an emergency, adequate drinking water becomes a necessity. During emergencies, water and food may not be available. During emergencies, food and water for residents 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. 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 there is no access to a clean water supply, use the water in hot-water tanks and pipes. As a last resort, use water in the reservoir tank of toilets (not the bowl). Also consider other sources outside the home, that include, 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. Do not drink flood water.

Purifying water

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: Use household liquid bleach to kill microorganisms. Use only regular household bleach that contains 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite. Do not use scented bleach, colorsafe 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.

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DOH
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