Response for *E. coli* at Public Water Systems

SAFE OPERATION OF FOOD, POOL, AND LODGING ESTABLISHMENTS

The presence of *Escherichia coli (E. coli)* bacteria in a drinking water system means the water is not safe for drinking. This fact sheet helps managers, persons in charge, and employees take steps to operate their establishment safely until the contamination problem is resolved.

Public Notification Requirements

The presence of *E. coli* in drinking water is a strong indicator of sewage contamination and can cause serious illness. When *E. coli* is detected in the drinking water supply, the water must not be used for drinking, food preparation, making ice, brushing teeth, or manual dishwashing. Public notifications are required, as described on the *E. coli* Posting Notice.

A Posting Notice about the contamination must be posted on all sinks, faucets, drinking water fountains, lodging rooms and other locations where the public has access to the drinking water. Food establishments must provide posting notice at the entry doors or at each table. Lodging establishments must provide posting notice at the check-in location.

The Minnesota Department of Health or your local health department will provide copies of an *E. coli* Public Notice that contains the necessary language:

E.coli Public Notice (PDF) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/water/docs/ncom/ecolipn.pdf).

One or more water sample results have detected E. coli bacteria in this water supply. To protect public health, the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has put in place water use restrictions, as long as coliform bacteria are present.

Possible Health Effects

E. coli are bacteria whose presence indicates that the water may be contaminated with human or animal wastes. Human pathogens in these wastes can cause short-term effects such as diarrhea, cramps, nausea, headaches, or other symptoms. They may pose a greater health risk for infants, young children, the elderly, and people with severely compromised immune systems.

Approved Sources for Safe Water

Water used for drinking, food preparation, and diluting cleaning solutions used on food-contact surfaces must be from an approved source. Some approved sources are:

- Commercially bottled water
- Water from a potable water tank truck with water from an approved public water supply and with a free chlorine residual of at least 0.5 parts per million (mg/L)
- Boiled water from building faucets; The water must be boiled for at least one minute and then allowed to cool before being used.

Restaurants and Bars

Ice

Use ice made from safe water in cleaned and sanitized equipment. You may need to purchase ice until after you have cleaned

and sanitized your ice machine and your water supply is safe.

Discard all ice previously made using water from the public water supply.

Ice bins

Wash with safe water from an approved source and sanitize in place prior to reuse. Cleaning and Sanitizing (PDF) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/food/docs/fs/cleansanfs.pdf).

Beverages

Discard any beverages made with water from the water supply system, such as juices, iced tea, and coffee. Beverage dispenser systems directly connected to the water supply, such as coffee machines and post-mix beverages, cannot be used until the contamination problem is corrected and the beverage lines are flushed with sanitized water. A safe alternative is to serve bottled and canned beverages.

Fruits, vegetables, and other foods

Use pre-washed and packaged fruits and vegetables obtained from approved commercial sources. Discard any prepared ready-to-eat fruits and vegetables or foods combined with raw fruits and vegetables that may have been washed with contaminated water.

Discard any food prepared that may have been washed with contaminated water or had water added.

Thawing foods

Foods must be thawed in the refrigerator or as part of the cooking process. Do not use running water from the contaminated water supply to thaw foods. Foods must be thawed in the refrigerator or as part of the cooking process.

Hand washing

If untreated water is used for hand washing, a commercially produced hand sanitizer wipe, lotion, or cream should be used following hand washing.

Preventing contamination from hands

Employees need to avoid contacting ready-to-eat food with bare hands. Handle ready-to-eat food by using:

- Deli tissue
- Spatulas
- Tongs
- Single-use gloves
- Dispensing equipment

Always discard and change gloves:

- As soon as they become soiled or torn.
- Before beginning a different task.
- After handling raw animal product.
- Before handling cooked or ready-to-eat food
- At least every four hours during continual use.

The use of hand antiseptics is recommended for customer toilet rooms.

Warewashing

Equipment food-contact surfaces may be cleaned and sanitized either manually or using a warewashing machine.

1. **Wash** in hot, soapy water
2. **Rinse** in clean water
3. **Sanitize** in chemicals or hot water.

Chemical sanitization

Soaking clean equipment in a chemical solution is one way to sanitize food-contact surfaces. Always follow label instructions.

Use the required sanitizer solution strength and contact time. Allow all equipment to air dry completely before storing. Use a test kit to verify the sanitizer concentration.

Hot water sanitization

- Manual warewashing: Soak equipment in water maintained at 171°F or higher for at least 30 seconds.
- Mechanical warewashing: Water temperature and pressure requirements vary depending on the type of machine. Use a thermometer or heat-sensitive tape to verify water temperature. Verify the rinse pressure by checking the pressure gauge.

Single-service utensils, plates, and cups may be used.

Water softeners

Water softeners should be bypassed until the water has been confirmed free of *E. coli* and total coliform.

Lodging Establishments

Check-in

Provide public notice to guests at check-in.

Laundering linens

Tap water may be used for automatic clothes washing machines when used with detergents.

Rooms

Provide sealed commercially bottled water in each room in addition to the required posting notice.

Bathing

Water may be used for taking showers and baths unless high concentrations of chlorine have been added to disinfect the water system. Infants and young children should not bathe using contaminated water, since they may ingest water while taking a bath.

Pets

Pets should only consume commercial bottled water or water that has been boiled for at least one minute, and then allowed to cool before use.

Swimming pools

Pools should be filled when the drinking water supply does not have *E. coli* in the water.

After *E. coli* contamination

Follow the manufacturer's recommended procedures for:

- Disinfecting water softeners prior to putting back online
- Disinfecting filters or replacing media in small filters on ice machines, water treatment systems, beverage vending machines
- Replacing carbon filters or carbon media in filters.

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Minnesota Department of Health
Drinking Water Protection
www.health.state.mn.us
To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-4700.