

# Emergency Home Drinking Water Supplies

## **Why have emergency water supplies?**

We often take our household water supply for granted. However, when safe drinking water is unavailable, it is more than just an inconvenience - it can become a health emergency. Interruptions may be for only a short period of time, or for days. Every household should have an emergency water supply to meet its members' needs during these situations.

## **How much water should I store?**

Having an ample supply of water is a top priority in an emergency. Most people need to drink at least two quarts (64 ounces), which is equal to eight cups, of water each day. Hot environments can double the amount needed as the body uses water for cooling. In general, store at least one gallon of water per person, per day of expected need. Storing at least a three-day supply is recommended, but consider storing a two-week supply if your home has storage space.

## **What containers should I use?**

You can store water in food grade plastic or glass containers with tight fitting screw-on lids. Plastic milk bottles should be avoided, because it is difficult to remove protein and fat residues, which may allow bacteria to grow during storage.

Containers not labeled for food or beverage storage could release harmful chemicals into the water. Never use a container that has held toxic substances, because tiny amounts may remain in the container's pores. Also, some old glass jars were made with glass that contains lead, and unacceptable amounts of lead can leach into water stored in them even for short periods.

## **How should I prepare the containers?**

Wash the containers and lids thoroughly with hot tap water and dish detergent. Rinse thoroughly with hot tap water.

## **Can I store my tap water?**

### Municipal Water Supply

If you are on a municipal water supply, the water you are currently using for drinking and cooking should also be suitable for storing for emergencies. While you can expect that water from a public water supply will be safe, remember that the container used to collect and store the water must also be clean.

## **Should I boil the water before storing it?**

Boiling the water before storage is not recommended. It will not prevent many problems that may occur during storage. In addition, boiling may concentrate other contaminants as the water evaporates away.

### **How should I treat the water for storage?**

First, be sure that the water you are treating is drinking-quality water. To treat water for storage, use liquid household chlorine bleach that contains 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite. Do not use bleach with soaps or scents added. Add the bleach according to the table below, using a clean, uncontaminated medicine dropper.

4 drops bleach per quart or liter container of water

8 drops bleach per 2-quart, 2-liter, or ½ gallon container of water

16 drops bleach, or 1/4 teaspoon, per gallon or 4-liter container of water

Stir the water and allow it to stand for 30 minutes. Chlorine should be detectable by odor after the 30 minute waiting period. If the water does not smell like chlorine at that point, repeat the dose and let it stand another 15 minutes. Place caps on containers and attach labels describing the contents and when each was prepared.

### **Where should I store the water and for how long?**

Store containers in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight. Because hydrocarbon vapors can penetrate polyethylene plastics, store water in plastic containers away from gasoline, kerosene, pesticides, or similar substances.

For best quality, replace water stored from a public or vended water supply every six months. To improve the taste of water stored for a long time, pour it from one clean container to another clean container several times, to put air back into it.

### **How do I keep water in opened containers safe?**

Once opened, sanitary measures are important when using the water to keep it safe and to control exposure to bacteria. To reduce the chance of water contamination, do not open more containers than are needed at the time. If electrical power is available, store opened containers in a refrigerator at or below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Use water in opened containers within one or two days.

### **What if I don't have enough stored water, and run out when I need it?**

If supplies run low, never ration drinking water. Drink the amount you need today, and try to find more for tomorrow. You can minimize the amount of water your body needs by reducing your activity level.

### **Hidden Water Sources in Your Home:**

If a disaster catches you without a sufficient stored supply of clean water, you can use the water in your hot-water tank, pipes, and ice cubes. As a last resort, you can use water in the reservoir tank of your toilet (not the bowl).

## **Summary**

Every home should have a supply of water stored for at least three days of emergency use. Store one gallon per person per day, and one quart per small pet. The water should be either municipal or bottled water, because these sources are inspected and tested regularly for many different contaminants. The container used for storing water must be clean, and made for food and water use. Household bleach is the only disinfectant needed in the water for storage. Rotate or use the stored water supply every six months.

Print out this information and place with your emergency supplies. Because when disaster strikes, you may not have electricity to download this information from your computer.

With only a small amount of effort and money, your family can be prepared with this most important necessity: a safe, adequate supply of drinking water during any natural disaster or power outage.