Commonwealth of Kentucky
Energy and Environment Cabinet

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Kentucky Division of Water provides guidance on emergency water disinfection

Power outages, low pressure continue in some areas

FRANKFORT, KY – (Feb. 9, 2009) – As power outages and low water pressure problems persist in some areas of the commonwealth following the recent ice storm, the Kentucky Division of Water urges residents to properly disinfect water for drinking, cooking, making prepared drinks and brushing teeth to kill harmful microorganisms.

The easiest alternative is to use bottled water if it is available and has not been exposed to flood waters.

In the absence of safe bottled water, tap water should be boiled to kill most types of disease-causing organisms that may be present. If the water is cloudy, filter it through clean cloths or coffee filters or allow it to settle. Afterwards, draw off the clear water and boil for one minute. The cooled water may be stored in clean containers with covers.

If you are unable to boil water, you can disinfect it using household bleach that contains 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite. Chlorine bleach will kill some, but not all, types of disease-causing organisms that may be in the water. **Do not use scented bleaches, color-safe bleaches or bleaches with added cleaners.** If the water is cloudy, again, filter it and use the clear water for disinfection. Add one-eighth teaspoon (or eight drops) of regular, unscented, liquid household chlorine bleach for each gallon of water (one teaspoon of bleach disinfects five gallons of water). Stir it well and let it stand for 30 minutes before use. Store the disinfected water in clean containers with covers.

Since liquid chlorine bleach loses strength over time, only fresh bleach should be used for water disinfection. For bleach that is one to two years old, the dosage should be doubled.

Another method if disinfection is to use common household iodine from the medicine chest or first-aid kit. Add five drops of 2 percent U.S. tincture of iodine to each quart or liter of clear water. For cloudy water, add ten drops and let the solution stand for at least 30 minutes.

Additional tips:

- To improve the taste or boiled or bleached-treated water, allow it to stand for several hours or aerate it by pouring from one clean container to another several times. A pinch of salt added per quart or liter will also improve the flat taste.
- Do not consume iodine-treated water if you are pregnant, iodine-sensitive or have a history of thyroid disease.
- Use bottled or boiled water for preparing powdered or concentrated infant formulas.
- Boil all tap water used for washing raw vegetables and fruit.
- Wash dishes in sink full of tap water to which one tablespoon of household bleach has been added. Air-dry the dishes before use.
- Use treated water for teeth brushing since swallowing could occur.
- Bathe or shower in untreated water but avoid contact with the mouth and eyes. Infants and toddlers should be sponge-bathed. No special soaps are necessary.
- See your family physician or healthcare provider if you become sick.
- Continue to treat water until officials remove the boil water advisory.

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