



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For additional information contact:

Lisa LaPlante at (616) 632-7182 or Lisa.LaPlante@kentcountymi.gov

UPDATE: Frequently Asked Questions Regarding *E. coli* in City of Rockford Water

ROCKFORD – Wednesday, the City of Rockford announced that water testing indicated the presence of *E. Coli*, after an equipment malfunction at the treatment plant over the holiday weekend. The city issued a Boil Water Advisory for customers of the Rockford Water System. The Kent County Health Department is working with the city to make sure residents know what they can do to protect themselves and their loved ones during the advisory period.

Frequently Asked Questions

I made food between Friday, August 30 and the time I became aware of this advisory. I used tap water to clean or prepare the food. Can I eat it? No. The Kent County Health Department recommends throwing the food away, as it may be contaminated.

Are my drinking glasses, dishes, and eating utensils safe to use? It depends on how they were cleaned. Dishwashers and hand washing rarely generate water that is hot enough to kill *E. coli*. The Kent County Health Department recommends rewashing any dishes with water that has been boiled for at least one minute, then cooled down, or bottled water. Do not use dishwashers until the advisory is lifted. Food preparation and dining areas, such as countertops and tables, should be cleaned with disinfectant and/or boiled or bottled water.

My refrigerator has a water filter and ice maker. Is this water safe to use? No. Water filters can't remove *E.coli* from tap water. Do not use any ice that your refrigerator has made in the last week. Once the advisory is lifted, make sure you allow the line to your ice maker to flush (following manufacturer's instructions), and throw out the first batch of ice it makes.

Can I wash my clothes? Yes. Wash them in hot water and dry them on the highest setting available.

How can I wash baby/kids toys? Infants and children tend to put toys in their mouths. Be sure to wash any of these items with soap and bottled or boiled water.

My house is in the Rockford area, but I live on a well or pay my water bill to another municipality. Does this advisory impact me? No. Only customers of Rockford City Water are impacted.

Can I shower? Yes, however there are a few concerns:

KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 260 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and four satellite clinics located in Wyoming, Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.

HEALTH DEPARTMENT
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Open Sores: you should not shower if you have open sores. The Kent County Health Department recommends taking a sponge bath instead. Do not use contaminated water to clean open sores.

Infants and Small Children: Parents should provide sponge baths and stay with the child at all times. Make sure the child does not get water in his or her mouth.

Following a bath or shower, you should wash your hands with soap and bottled water or water that has been boiled then cooled down. Follow that up with hand sanitizer.

Can I give my pets water? Domesticated animals have a hardy immune system, but can get sick from contaminated water. The Kent County Health Department suggests boiling water, then cooling it, before providing it to your pets.

The Kent County Health Department staff is working closely with licensed restaurants and food service facilities in the affected area. They have been given special instructions on maintaining safe standards during the advisory period; however, a number of facilities have voluntarily closed. Health department officials have been in contact with health care providers and other local health departments to make them aware of the situation, in case of suspected illness. So far, there have been no confirmed cases of illness related to the water. Again, the health department recommends the following:

1. Water from the city system should not be used for drinking, brushing teeth, making ice, preparing/washing foods, or washing dishes. Any water used for these activities should be brought to a boil. Let it bubble for at least one minute, and let it cool before using. Boiling kills bacteria and other organisms in the water. Bottled water is also recommended for these activities during the advisory. Continue using boiled or bottled water until further notice. **DO NOT DRINK THE WATER WITHOUT BOILING IT FIRST.**
2. Drinking fountains should be shut off. This is especially necessary in public buildings, schools, workplaces, and churches.
3. If you experience significant gastrointestinal issues, and used city water in the past 48-72 hours, discuss with your health care provider. Those with compromised immune systems, infants, women who are pregnant, or the elderly are at increased risk of illness from bacteria in drinking water. Symptoms of illness from E. coli exposure typically take 2-4 days to develop, but can take as many as eight days.
4. The Health Department recommends hand washing for a minimum of 20 seconds with water that has been boiled then cooled or with bottled water, followed by using a hand sanitizer. Sponge baths are recommended for children. After showering or bathing, wash hands with water that has been boiled then cooled or with bottled water, followed by using a hand sanitizer. Avoid getting water in your (or your child's) mouth.

Continue using boiled or bottled water until further notice. The city of Rockford noted on its Facebook page that free bottled water is being distributed again to impacted residents on Thursday, September 5, 2013. The city continues to update residents on the situation through the local media, [on their website](#), and on the city's [facebook page](#).

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