UK EMERGENCY GUIDE

Water supply loss & contamination

A burst main, a power cut at a treatment works, or a rare contamination incident can leave taps dry or unsafe. Your water company is the first place to check. Bottled water, a boil-water plan, and knowing the difference between a boil notice and a do-not-drink notice will carry you through.

IF YOU ONLY DO THREE THINGS

01 Keep at least 3 litres of bottled drinking water per person per day, for three days, plus extra for pets, hygiene and any medical need.

02 If your company issues a boil-water notice, bring tap water to a rolling boil before drinking, brushing teeth, making ice, cooking or giving it to pets — then let it cool naturally.

03 If you are told “do not drink”, do not consume tap water at all, even if boiled. Use bottled water or the alternative supply your company provides, and follow their instructions exactly.

LIFE-THREATENING EMERGENCY

999

If someone is seriously unwell after drinking water you believe is contaminated.

YOUR WATER COMPANY

On your bill

Find them at water.org.uk/customers/find-your-supplier. PSR: thepsr.co.uk.

This guide is general public information for UK households. It is not a substitute for the emergency services, official local advice, or professional medical training. In an emergency, always call 999. Official warning and response advice can change — follow current guidance from the emergency services, the NHS and gov.uk/prepare. Three Day Kit (threedaykit.co.uk) is an independent brand and is not affiliated with, or endorsed by, the UK government or any official agency.

BEFORE

STORE WATER AND KNOW YOUR SUPPLIER

Most interruptions are short. Longer outages do happen, and they are much easier if you already have drinking water in the house and know who to call.

01 **Store bottled water for three days**
Official preparedness advice is 3 litres per person per day for drinking. You will need more for cooking, washing, pets, medical devices or making up feeds. Check dates and rotate the stock through normal use. Keep some in your Three Day Kit and some in a cool, dark cupboard.

02 **Find your water company now**
The name and emergency number are on your bill. You can also use **water.org.uk/customers/find-your-supplier**. In Scotland, use Scottish Water; in Northern Ireland, NI Water. Save the number on your phone and write it on paper.

03 **Sign up for support if you need more water**
The Priority Services Register (thepsr.co.uk) is free. If you use more water because of a medical condition, or you would struggle to collect bottled supplies, tell your company now. If you rely on a medical device that needs water, agree a plan with your care team.

04 **Know the two types of notice**
A **boil-water notice** means the tap water might contain harmful microbes. Boiling to a rolling boil makes it safe to drink once cooled. A **do-not-drink** (or do-not-use) notice means contamination may not be removed by boiling — do not consume the water, and follow the company's instructions for washing and cooking.

05 **Think about toilets, hygiene and formula**
If you have a garden butt, that water is not for drinking, but it can flush a toilet. Keep hand sanitiser and wet wipes for when taps are dry. Ready-to-feed formula is the safest option if you cannot boil water. Bottled water is not usually recommended for powdered formula, except in a rare emergency — if you must, the NHS says it should be still water with no more than 200 mg/l sodium and 250 mg/l sulphate, boiled and cooled for no more than 30 minutes.

06 **Private supplies need extra care**
If your water comes from a well, spring or private network, your local authority is involved. After flooding, do not use it until it has been checked. When in doubt, use bottled water.

DURING

NO WATER, OR WATER YOU HAVE BEEN TOLD TO TREAT

01 **Call your company and follow their notice, not social media rumours**
Check their website or app for your postcode and for bottled-water collection points. If you are on the Priority Services Register and have not had help, contact them again. Report discoloured, strange-tasting or smelly water — and keep a clean, labelled sample in the fridge if you can.

02 **If it is a boil-water notice**
Bring water to a rolling boil, take it off the heat and let it cool naturally. Store it in a clean container in the fridge and use it within 24 hours. Use boiled-and-cooled water for drinking, teeth, ice, food preparation, washing salads and pet bowls. You can usually still shower, bathe, wash clothes and flush toilets; keep water out of your mouth. Wash dishes in hot water and dry them thoroughly. Do not rely on a jug filter unless the company or manufacturer says it is effective.

03 **If it is a do-not-drink notice**
Do not drink tap water or use it in food, even if boiled. Use bottled water or the alternative supply provided. The company will tell you whether showering and flushing are still allowed. Wait for them to lift the notice.

04 **Ration what you have for drinking, hands and food first**
Use bottled or alternative water for drinking, handwashing and preparing food. Soft drinks in the cupboard are fine; do not drink milk or juice that may have spoiled. Fill a clean bowl with a little water and soap to wash hands, so you do not run tanks dry.

AFTER

WHEN THE SUPPLY RETURNS

01 **Run the cold tap and wait for official all-clear**
Discoloured water is common after an outage. Run the cold tap nearest the stopcock until it clears. If it does not, or if taste or smell is off, call your company. Only stop boiling or avoiding tap water when they say the notice is lifted. Replace any filter cartridges you used during the incident if advised.

02 **Restock and check you are owed an update or payment**
Replace bottled water you used. Ofwat and CCW set out what communication and, in some cases, payments water companies should provide after a supply failure. Keep notes of times and contact if you need to follow up.

WHAT TO HAVE IN YOUR KIT

The core of a Three Day Kit is water: 3 litres of bottled drinking water per person per day, for three days, with extra for pets and hygiene. Add no-cook food, a tin opener, hand sanitiser, wet wipes, a torch, a power bank, any medicines, and ready-to-feed formula if you need it. Write your water company's emergency number on the paper contacts list in the kit.

PRINTABLE CHECKLIST

TICK WHAT YOU HAVE DONE

- [ ] Bottled drinking water: 3 litres per person per day, for 3 days
- [ ] Water dates checked and stock rotated in the last six months
- [ ] Priority Services Register considered (thepsr.co.uk)
- [ ] Hand sanitiser and wet wipes in the house
- [ ] Household understands boil-water versus do-not-drink notices
- [ ] Private supply (if any) checked after flooding before use
- [ ] Neighbours who may need help collecting water identified
- [ ] Extra water allowed for pets, washing and any medical need
- [ ] Water company name and emergency number written down
- [ ] Stopcock located, and a plan for flushing the toilet if mains fail
- [ ] Ready-to-feed formula if anyone in the household needs it
- [ ] Jug filters not relied on unless the company says they are suitable
- [ ] Clean bottles or containers available to store boiled, cooled water
- [ ] Used water restocked after any outage

UK CONTACTS

WRITE THESE DOWN

EMERGENCY SERVICES / NHS
999 · 111
999 if someone is in immediate danger or severely unwell. 111 for urgent advice.

FIND YOUR WATER COMPANY
water.org.uk/customers/find-your-supplier
Emergency number is also on your bill. Scotland: Scottish Water. NI: NI Water.

PRIORITY SERVICES REGISTER
thepsr.co.uk
Free extra support, including alternative supplies during an outage.

DRINKING WATER INSPECTORATE
dwi.gov.uk
Advice on boil-water notices and discoloured water (England and Wales).

CCW (ENGLAND AND WALES)
ccw.org.uk
The voice for water consumers, including complaints after an outage.

POWER CUT (IF PUMPS HAVE FAILED)
105
A power cut can also interrupt water. NI: 03457 643 643.

FLOODING OF THE SUPPLY
0345 988 1188
Floodline, plus your water company if quality has changed.

OFFICIAL PREPAREDNESS ADVICE
gov.uk/prepare
Water-outage pages on the Prepare / Be Ready campaign site.

SOURCES

Guidance in this booklet was checked against publicly available official advice in November 2026. Always follow the latest instructions from the emergency services and the links below.

1. UK government Prepare / Be Ready, water supply interruptions or outages — beready.campaign.gov.uk / prepare.campaign.gov.uk
2. Drinking Water Inspectorate, receiving a boil-water notice, discoloured water and flooding — dwi.gov.uk
3. Water UK, find your supplier — water.org.uk/customers/find-your-supplier
4. NHS advice on making up infant formula, including bottled water in rare emergencies — nhs.uk
5. Ofwat and CCW information on company communication and customer rights during interruptions

General guidance only — not a substitute for the emergency services or professional medical training. Call 999 in an emergency. Independent brand, not a government publication.