

## **Public Health Advice when water supply is low**

The Public Health Agency has issued the following advice to the public in relation to keeping healthy when mains water is unavailable.

### **How do I keep my hands clean without mains water?**

It is still very important to ensure that your hands are clean before cooking food and eating as many gastrointestinal illnesses are transmitted through dirty hands. The very young and the elderly are especially vulnerable. For this reason people should:

- Use any water you have for hand hygiene first before you use it for showering and bathing
- Use antibacterial hand gels or wipes if you have them
- Be extra vigilant in supervising small children keeping their hands clean

### **Can I drink the water I get from the bowser at the distribution points?**

Bottled water should be used in preference for drinking when your water is in short supply. Bowser water is drinkable however the following steps should be taken:

- Ensure that you use a very clean receptacle to collect the water.
- If you are unsure regarding cleanliness of the receptacle it is advised that you boil the water and cool it, before using it for cooking and drinking.

### **Can I brush my teeth with water from a bowser?**

The water you use to brush your teeth should be of the same quality as the water you drink. In preference use bottled water.

### **My baby is on formula feed so how do I feed my baby?**

- Use boiled water brought to a 'rolling boil' and make up feed in the usual way
- Ready made preparations are available and can be used as an alternative
- It should be noted that some types of bottled water may not be suitable for making up infant formula because of high salt levels (sodium concentrations of less than 20mg/l are preferable and not more than 200mg/l). There may be labelling on the bottle that will indicate if it is not suitable for making up infant formula.

### **How do I maintain personal hygiene when water is in short supply?**

A small amount of water can be used to fill a bathroom sink and sponges or facecloths used for personal washing with soap. Separate cloths / sponges should be used for the face and genital areas. Each person in the household should have their own designated cloth/sponge and towel. Alternatives to this include using sanitary wipes, alcohol based gels. Note alcohol based gels cannot be used on the face or genital areas.

### **How do I maintain a clean environment at home without mains water?**

The most important places to keep clean are the surfaces where food is prepared or eaten, toilet and wash hand basin in bathrooms. Surfaces and sinks can be cleaned with disinfectant wipes or if a small amount of water is available use a clean cloth and the usual cleaning solutions. Toilet cleaner and domestic bleach can be used to clean toilets.

### **How do I flush my toilet without mains water?**

Flushing a toilet uses 3-7 litres of water so it is important that unnecessary flushing does not take place.

- Toilets do not require sterile water for flushing
- Water from distribution points can be used if you have enough to drink
- Waste water can be used to flush the toilet such as dish water. You can fill the cistern with that water or pour it down the toilet until the toilet is cleared.
- Rain water can be collected in buckets and used for this purpose.

### **How do I keep my house warm without mains water?**

Most houses have central heating systems that are based on radiators filled with water that are heated by an oil or gas boiler. There is a chance that these systems will be affected by the shortage of mains water supplies. It is important if your heating is not working to take the following steps:

- Consult a plumber to assess the cause of the non functioning boiler
- If using alternative heating appliances ensure they have been adequately maintained and manufactures instructions are followed.

- The important message is to keep yourself warm so:
  - Wear several thin layers of clothing as they will keep you warmer than one thick layer. Wear a hat, gloves and scarf if necessary.
  - When inside keeping moving and try not to sit still for more than one hour at a time as activity generates body heat.
  - Eat well with frequent warm healthy meals and drinks – but avoid alcoholic drink as this can lower body temperature.

Finally the PHA advises that people check on their vulnerable and elderly neighbours who may not be able to get water from distribution points and make sure they have everything they need to keep warm, watered and fed.