8 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT WATER SAFETY

1 Pay attention to boil-water warnings from your band council. During boil-water advisories or boil-water orders, you should bring your water to a rolling boil for at least one minute. Use only this boiled water for drinking, cooking, making ice cubes, washing fruits and vegetables, and brushing teeth. If you have infants and toddlers, make sure that they do not drink the water while they are having their bath. As of February 2012, there were 112 First Nations communities across Canada under a drinking water advisory.

2 Flush your pipes. If you have piped water and your water service is interrupted at some point, run your cold water tap to flush the line once service resumes. Most of First Nations homes receive piped water.

3 Thirteen percent of First Nations homes get their water from wells. If you use well water, maintain the well properly and test your well water regularly.
   - Run your cold water tap for a few minutes each morning or when the system has not been used for several hours.
   - Use only cold water for drinking, cooking and making baby formula. Hot water may contain toxic metals such as lead.
   - Check your well cap regularly. It should be securely in place and watertight.
   - Test your well at least once per year for coliform bacteria.
   - Test your well water occasionally for inorganic and organic chemical contaminants.

4 Thirty-six percent of First Nations homes use a septic tank to handle wastewater. If you have a septic tank, use it properly and maintain it regularly.
   - Do not pour paints, solvents, thinners, nail polish remover, medicines, or antibiotics down the drain or into your toilet. These chemicals can kill the good bacteria in the septic tank that are required to break down the organic matter in your wastewater.
   - Never put oils, grease, fat, disposable diapers, tampons, condoms, cat box litter, plastics, cigarette filters, eggshells, or other kitchen waste into your septic system. These solids can block your system and shorten its life.
   - If your septic tank has effluent filters, clean them out on a regular basis. The timing will depend on the type and size of the filters and the amount of water you use.
• Pump out your septic tank every three to five years, or when one-third of the tank is filled with solids (sludge). Get a licensed professional to pump and dispose of the waste.

• Watch for signs that your septic system is not working properly. Signs may include showers and sinks that take a long time to drain, raw sewage odours, and spongy grass growing over the system. If you suspect a problem, contact a licensed professional.

5 Do not drink directly from ponds, lakes or rivers. This water may contain harmful bacteria, parasites, pesticides, metals, and other contaminants.

6 If possible, do not drink from clear, hard polycarbonate plastic bottles. These types of bottles may release small amounts of bisphenol A (BPA). BPA is a chemical that can interfere with your body’s natural hormones. BPA exposure should be especially avoided by pregnant women, babies and young children.

7 Was the plumbing in your home installed before 1990? Until the late 1980s, lead solder was commonly used to join household plumbing. Even small amounts of lead can be harmful to the developing brains and nervous systems of fetuses, babies and young children. Long-term lead exposure can lead to high blood pressure and peripheral vascular disease. If you live in an older home, consider getting your water tested for lead. You can also reduce your risk by drinking cold water because lead is less likely to leach from your pipes into cold water.

8 Water is a sacred and life-sustaining element. Conserve water by reducing the amount of water you use. Some easy ways are fixing leaky faucets, repairing running toilets and installing low-flow toilets.

References


