OFFLINE RESILIENCE GUIDE // UK EDITION

Emergency Sanitation During a Water or Power Outage

How to prioritise safe drinking water, hand hygiene, toilets and contaminated floodwater when normal water or sewerage systems are disrupted.

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LAYER 1 // ACT

FIRST ACTIONS

Start here. Then read the conditions and exceptions below.

1. Protect clean drinking water from being spent on low-priority washing.
2. Keep hand hygiene working after toilet use and before food preparation.
3. Follow local instructions if sewerage or flushing is unavailable; do not improvise against official advice.
4. Treat floodwater as potentially contaminated with sewage, chemicals and debris.
5. Do not use questionable tap water for drinking or food if your water company tells you not to.

IMPORTANT
This is preparedness information, not a substitute for emergency services, medical advice or instructions from responsible authorities. In immediate danger call 999 or 112.

Sanitation becomes a priority surprisingly quickly

A water outage is not only a drinking-water problem. Toilets, hand washing, food preparation and cleaning all compete for the same limited supply. The efficient plan protects the cleanest water for drinking, preparing food and essential hand hygiene.

If an outage is part of a wider incident, follow the water company, local authority and public-health instructions because the condition of the water and sewerage network can vary by location.

Hand hygiene is worth reserving water for

The NHS describes hand washing as one of the simplest ways to reduce the spread of infections and recommends soap and water after using the toilet and before eating or handling food. If soap and water are temporarily unavailable, alcohol-based hand sanitiser can be useful when hands are not visibly dirty.

During a prolonged outage, organise one clearly identified place for hand cleaning and keep food preparation separate from toilet and waste handling.

If the sewerage system cannot be used, follow the incident instructions

UK Chief Medical Officers' contingency planning for the very unlikely scenario of a national power outage assumes that sewerage may be unavailable. In that specific scenario, the published health advice describes collecting faeces in plastic bags, sealing them and disposing of them with household waste, ideally in an outside bin.

Do not apply that national-outage contingency to an ordinary power cut. Follow local instructions and the actual condition of your water and sewerage services.

Floodwater is not cleaning water

UKHSA guidance says floodwater can contain sewage and other contaminants and recommends protective clothing for clean-up. Keep children and pets away from contaminated areas, protect cuts, and clean hands and hard surfaces properly after contact.

Food or utensils contaminated by floodwater need separate handling; do not move mud or dirty equipment through the clean food-preparation area.

Know the difference between a boil notice and a do-not-use notice

The Drinking Water Inspectorate says that when a boil-water notice is issued, water intended for drinking and several food-related uses should be brought to the boil and allowed to cool. In rare cases a water company may instead tell customers not to use the supply at all.

The instruction from the water provider overrides generic preparedness advice. Keep bottled water or another approved supply available so you are not forced to guess.

A small sanitation box is high-value preparedness

Useful non-specialist items include strong waste bags, household gloves, soap, hand sanitiser, disinfectant appropriate to the task, paper towels, waterproof dressings and a way to keep clean and dirty items separate. These are inexpensive compared with most preparedness equipment and solve common failure modes.

Useful kit for this plan

Equipment should support the plan, not replace judgement or skill. The commercial catalogue is kept on a separate page.

KIT IS KEPT SEPARATE
Named products and Amazon UK affiliate links are kept on the dedicated KIT page so this guide remains editorial. Use the kit only after the plan identifies a genuine equipment gap.

OPEN KIT →

Sources checked for this guide

We use public sources for the factual backbone and write the guide in our own words. Source pages can change, so the links below are the place to check current official advice.

> **PRIMARY / AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE**
> **GOV.UK: Water and sanitation during a national power outage**
> Public-health contingency advice for drinking water, hygiene and toilets if infrastructure is unavailable.
> https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-health-advice-from-uk-cmos-during-a-national-power-outage/water-and-sanitation-scripts-for-broadcast-media

> **PRIMARY / AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE**
> **NHS: How to wash your hands**
> When to wash hands, effective technique and use of hand sanitiser when soap and water are unavailable.
> https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/best-way-to-wash-your-hands/

> **PRIMARY / AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE**
> **GOV.UK / UKHSA: Flooding and health**
> Health risks from floodwater and safe household clean-up.
> https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flooding-and-health-public-advice/flooding-and-health-advice-for-the-public

> **PRIMARY / AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE**
> **Drinking Water Inspectorate: Boil water notices**
> What a boil notice means, which uses require boiled water and when a supply may be declared unusable.
> https://www.dwi.gov.uk/receiving-a-boil-water-notice/

Editorial review date: 25 September 2026. If an official source conflicts with this page, follow the official source.

INFORMATION CHECK✓ CURRENT REVIEW

REVIEWED	NEXT REVIEW DUE	OFFICIAL REFERENCES
25 Sep 2026	23 Jan 2027	4 primary sources

If an official source conflicts with this guide, follow the current official source.

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Source page: https://getpreppednow.co.uk/guides/emergency-sanitation-water-outage-uk.html
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