OFFLINE RESILIENCE GUIDE // UK EDITION

Water Treatment + Emergency Sanitation

Know when stored water is safest, what boiling can and cannot fix, and how to prevent a water outage from becoming a hygiene problem.

OFFLINE REFERENCE | UPDATED 30 SEP 2026 | UK FOCUS

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LAYER 1 // ACT

FIELD CARD

Immediate actions first. Then read the conditions and limits below.

FIRST ACTIONS

- Use known safe stored/bottled water first when the mains supply is suspect.
- Follow the exact water-company/local-authority notice: “boil”, “do not drink” and “do not use” mean different things.
- Keep clean water containers and dirty-water handling physically separate.
- If floodwater or chemical contamination is possible, do not assume household boiling or a camping filter makes it drinkable.

DO NOT

- Do not drink floodwater.
- Do not assume a clear appearance or normal smell proves water is safe.
- Do not use a filter outside its certified contaminant limits.
- Do not improvise chemical doses when an approved product label or official instruction is available.

IF THIS HAPPENS

- If mains water changes colour, taste or smell, contact the water company and use an alternative supply or follow its advice.
- If sewerage is backing up, stop adding wastewater where possible and keep people away from contamination.

WHAT YOU NEED

- Stored potable water
- Food-grade containers
- Soap / hand sanitiser / wipes
- Approved water-treatment product if part of your plan
- Heavy-duty bags/absorbent material for a temporary toilet plan

> **BOUNDARY**
> This is a practical reference aid. Current official instructions, emergency services, competent professionals and product documentation take priority where they conflict.

Start with known-safe water

Stored potable water is the least ambiguous option when normal supply is interrupted. UK Prepare notes that needs vary and cites 2.5–3 litres of drinking water per person per day as a minimum survival reference, with more needed for cooking, hygiene, babies, medical devices and pets. Rotate stored water according to container/manufacturer guidance and protect it from contamination.

Suspect mains water

If tap water changes colour, taste or smell, contact the water company. During an incident, the company may issue a boil-water notice, a do-not-drink notice or a do-not-use notice. Those are not interchangeable. A do-not-use instruction can reflect contamination for which even bathing or washing may be restricted. Follow the incident notice exactly.

Boiling: strong for microbes, useless for many chemicals

UK public-health guidance describes boiling as one of the most effective ways to deal with microbial contamination. It can kill bacteria, viruses and parasites when done according to the official notice. It does not remove harmful chemicals, fuels, heavy metals or many flood contaminants and may concentrate some dissolved substances as water evaporates. If chemical contamination is possible, use an alternative supply and official advice.

Filtration

A filter only removes what it is designed and certified to remove. A basic particulate filter may make water clearer but do little against viruses or dissolved chemicals. Some backcountry filters target protozoa/bacteria; activated carbon may reduce some tastes/organics; specialist systems have different limits. Read the product standard and contaminant claims rather than treating “filtered” as a universal safety state.

Chemical disinfection

For household preparedness, prefer a purpose-made drinking-water disinfection product and follow its label exactly for water volume, contact time and temperature. Different chemicals and concentrations require different dosing, so this guide deliberately does not give a universal household-bleach recipe. Chemical disinfection is aimed mainly at microbes and does not make chemically polluted or flood-contaminated water safe.

Containers and cross-contamination

Use clean, food-grade containers for drinking water and keep caps, taps and scoops clean. Do not dip dirty cups or hands into stored water. Label non-potable water clearly. Keep water used for toilet flushing or cleaning separate from drinking supplies so nobody can confuse them in low light or stress.

Hand hygiene when water is scarce

Handwashing with safe water and soap remains important after toilet use and before preparing food. UK public-health guidance advises using bottled water for handwashing if the normal water supply is disrupted/unsafe. Alcohol hand sanitiser can be useful when hands are not visibly dirty, but it does not solve every contamination problem and is not a substitute for safe water in food preparation.

Temporary toilet principles

If the sewer is working but water is off, local advice may permit limited flushing with non-potable water. If sewerage is backing up or authorities advise against flushing, stop adding wastewater. A temporary household toilet can use a sturdy lined container or an existing toilet bowl with the water supply isolated, using heavy-duty bags and absorbent material. Seal waste, keep it away from children/pets/food and follow council instructions for disposal. Do not dispose of bags into floodwater or drains.

Floodwater is a contamination source

Floodwater can contain sewage, fuels, chemicals, sharp objects and hidden electrical hazards. Do not treat it as a routine raw-water source for drinking. During cleanup use protective clothing and hand hygiene, and follow UKHSA/local-authority advice. If a private well or spring has been flooded, assume it is unsafe until the relevant authority confirms otherwise.

Verify / learn

These references are resolved from GPN’s central source registry so authority, coverage and source changes can be managed in one place. If a current official source conflicts with this guide, follow the current official source.

PRIMARY / AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE

Drinking Water Inspectorate: boil-water notice

Always follow the specific notice from the water company/local authority; boiling does not remove chemical contamination.

https://www.dwi.gov.uk/receiving-a-boil-water-notice/

PRIMARY / AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE

UKHSA / GOV.UK flooding and health advice

General public-health guidance; local authorities and utilities may issue incident-specific instructions.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flooding-and-health-public-advice/flooding-and-health-advice-for-the-public

PRIMARY / AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE

UK Government Prepare

Preparedness guidance, not a live incident feed.

https://prepare.campaign.gov.uk/get-prepared-for-emergencies/

Editorial review date: 30 September 2026. Next scheduled review: 28 January 2027.

INFORMATION CHECK✓ CURRENT REVIEW

REVIEWED	NEXT REVIEW DUE	REGISTERED REFERENCES
30 Sep 2026	28 Jan 2027	3 sources

Source availability is not hazard status. Offline reference material must never be interpreted as a live all-clear.

GET PREPPED NOW // ORIGINAL GUIDE

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