

Storing Drinking Water for Emergencies

All households are advised to store drinking water for use in emergencies. The Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management's advice is to add household bleach to stored water, especially if the water comes from an untreated source.

Not all bleaches are safe to use

Consumers are being warned not to use household bleach containing fragrances or surfactants/detergents to treat drinking water stored for emergencies.



The Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management has issued a warning that bleaches containing these additives shouldn't be used to disinfect drinking water as they can make people sick.

Surfactants will make the water foam or bubble when it is shaken or mixed. Bleaches with these additives are difficult to identify because cleaning product manufacturers aren't required to list ingredients.

Janola, one of the most well-known bleach brands, shouldn't be used. Manufacturer Pental Products states all Janola liquid bleaches contain surfactants and aren't suitable for treating drinking water.

Alternatives that manufacturers have advised can be used include:

- Budget Bleach Regular and Budget Bleach Extra Strength. **Note:** Budget Bleach Lemon shouldn't be used because it contains lemon fragrance.
- Clor-o-Gen bleach

If the product's label is not clear about what has been added to the bleach, do not use the product for the safe storage of water.

Instructions for safely storing water

Don't use plastic milk bottles as the milk protein can't be removed by washing and can cause bacterial growth.

A supply of at least three litres per person per day for three days is recommended.

- Wash bottles thoroughly in hot water.
- Fill each bottle with tap water until it overflows so no air is trapped.
- Add *five drops* of plain, household bleach per litre of water (or half a teaspoon for 10 litres) and put in storage. Do not drink for at least 30 minutes after disinfecting.
- Do not use bleaches that contain added scent or perfume, surfactants or other additives - they can make people sick.
- Label each bottle with dates showing when the bottles were filled and when they need to be refilled.
- Check the bottles every 12 months. If the water is not clear, throw it out and refill clean bottles with clean water and bleach.
- Store bottles away from direct sunlight in a cool dark place. Keep them in two separate places and where there is not likely to be flooding.

You can also fill plastic ice cream containers with water, cover, label and keep in the freezer. These can help keep food cool if the power is off and can also be used for drinking.

Your hot water cylinder and toilet cistern are valuable sources of water. Check that your hot water cylinder and header tank are well secured. Do not put chemical cleaners in the cistern if you want to use the water.

If you use collected rain water, make sure that you disinfect it with household bleach.

If you are uncertain about the quality of water, e.g. from a well that has been flooded, or if it might have been contaminated by smoke or volcanic ash, do not drink it.

Advice for storing water

Label the bottle with a date showing when it was filled. The Ministry of Health advises water treated with bleach can be stored for 12 months.

If you're storing tap water from a reticulated supply without adding bleach, replace it at least every 6 months.

Store the bottles away from direct sunlight in a cool dark place.

Sources: *Get Ready Get Thru* (www.getthru.govt.nz) and *Consumer NZ* (www.consumer.org.nz).

