

FREE PRINTABLE GUIDE

The Emergency Water Storage *Guide*

How much water your household really needs, how to store it safely, and how to make water safe to drink when the taps stop.

1 gal

per person, per day

2 weeks

the storage goal to aim for

6 months

how often to refresh stored
water

How much water does your household need?

You can go weeks without food, but only a few days without water. Health agencies recommend storing **at least 1 gallon per person, per day**, for drinking and basic hygiene. Start with 3 days, then build toward a **2-week supply**.

People in your home	3-day minimum	2-week goal
1 person	3 gallons	14 gallons
2 people	6 gallons	28 gallons
3 people	9 gallons	42 gallons
4 people	12 gallons	56 gallons
5 people	15 gallons	70 gallons
6 people	18 gallons	84 gallons

Your number: _____ people × 1 gallon × _____ days = _____ gallons

Store more if your household has...

- ☐ Children, nursing mothers, or anyone who is sick: they may need more water
- ☐ Hot weather: water needs can double in a hot climate
- ☐ Pets: add extra water for each animal
- ☐ Medical needs that use water, such as certain equipment or extra hygiene

Tip: 1 US gallon is about 3.8 liters. A standard case of 24 half-liter bottles holds about 3 gallons, roughly a 3-day supply for one person.

Choose the right containers

The easiest option is store-bought bottled water. If you fill your own containers, the container matters as much as the water.

EASIEST

Commercially bottled water

Keep it sealed in the original packaging and check the "use by" date. No cleaning or treatment needed.

BEST FOR DIY

Food-grade water containers

Containers sold for water storage, from 5- to 7-gallon jugs up to large barrels. Durable, tight-sealing, and made for drinking water.

WORKS

Clean plastic drink bottles

Sturdy bottles with a tight screw cap, such as soda bottles, cleaned and sanitized first (see page 4).

AVOID

Glass containers

They can break during an emergency, exactly when you need them most.

AVOID

Milk and juice jugs

Hard to clean fully, and the thin plastic can break down and leak over time.

NEVER

Chemical containers

Never reuse anything that held bleach, pesticides, or other chemicals, even after washing.

A good container has...

- ☐ A tight-closing lid or cap
- ☐ Durable, unbreakable material (not glass)
- ☐ Ideally a narrow neck, so you can pour without dipping hands or cups inside

Clean, fill, and store it safely

Follow these steps for any container you fill yourself. It takes about 10 minutes per batch.

- 1 **Wash** the container and cap with dish soap and water, then rinse well.
- 2 **Sanitize:** mix **1 teaspoon of unscented liquid household bleach in 1 quart (4 cups) of water**. Pour it in, close the cap, and shake so it touches every inside surface.
- 3 **Wait 30 seconds**, then pour the solution out.
- 4 **Air-dry** the container completely before filling.
- 5 **Fill** with clean tap water. If your water comes from a private well or another untreated source, make it safe first (page 5).
- 6 **Seal tightly**, and don't touch the inside of the cap with your fingers.
- 7 **Label** each container "Drinking Water" with the date you filled it.
- 8 **Store** in a cool spot (about 50–70°F), out of direct sunlight, and away from fuel, paint, and chemicals.
- 9 **Replace** water you filled yourself **every 6 months**, and use the log on page 6 to keep track.

Your water storage shopping list

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Bottled water, or food-grade storage containers | ☐ Medicine dropper (for treating water) |
| ☐ Unscented liquid household bleach | ☐ Permanent marker and labels |
| ☐ Dish soap and a measuring spoon | ☐ Coffee filters or clean cloths |

Tip: Store water in more than one place, such as a closet, under a bed, or the garage shelf away from chemicals. If one spot becomes hard to reach, you still have water.

How to make water safe to drink

If your stored water runs out, or authorities issue a "boil water" notice, use one of these methods. If water is cloudy, first **filter it** through a clean cloth, paper towel, or coffee filter, or let it settle and pour off the clear water.

Method 1: Boiling (the safest method)

Bring clear water to a **rolling boil for 1 minute**. At elevations above 6,500 feet, boil for **3 minutes**.

Let it cool, then store it in clean, sanitized containers with tight covers.

Method 2: Household bleach (when you can't boil)

Use only **unscented** household chlorine bleach. Check the label for the strength (sodium hypochlorite %).

Bleach strength	Clear water, per gallon	Cloudy water, per gallon
5–9% (most household bleach)	8 drops (½ mL)	16 drops (1 mL)
1%	40 drops (2½ mL)	80 drops (5 mL)

Stir, then **let it stand at least 30 minutes** before drinking.

Important

- ❗ **Never use scented, color-safe, or "splash-less" bleach** to treat water.
- ❗ **Boiling and bleach kill germs but don't remove chemicals.** If water may be contaminated with fuel or chemicals, don't use it; find another source.
- ❗ **Always follow local "boil water" or "do not drink" notices** from your water utility or health department.

Water already in your home

If your supply runs low, these sources can help. Use them only if they haven't been contaminated, and treat any water you're unsure about (page 5).



Water heater tank

- ☐ Holds 30–80 gallons in many homes
- ☐ Turn off the power or gas first, let the water cool, then drain from the valve at the bottom



Household pipes

- ☐ Shut off the main water valve if there's a contamination warning
- ☐ Open the highest faucet in the house to let air in, then collect water from the lowest one



Ice cubes

- ☐ Melt ice made from safe tap water
- ☐ Frozen water bottles in the freezer count too



Toilet tank (not the bowl)

- ☐ Use for flushing and cleaning only
- ☐ **Never drink it**, especially if you use tank cleaning tablets

Is water your only gap? Water is just one part of being ready for a long disruption. To see how your household scores across eight key areas, try the free **7-Day Household Readiness Assessment** → (takes 4–6 minutes).

Water storage log · refresh self-filled water every 6 months

Container	Stored where	Filled on	Replace by

YOUR NEXT STEP

Water is covered. What about the rest?

With a two-week water supply stored and labeled, you've handled the most important part of emergency readiness. But a long disruption also tests your food, power, heat, health supplies, communication, money, and family plan.

FREE 4-6 MINUTE ASSESSMENT

The 7-Day Household Readiness Assessment

Your readiness score

One overall score for how your household would cope with 7 days of disruption.

8 key areas

See how you're doing across eight essential areas of readiness.

Your weak links

The gaps most likely to matter in a multi-day disruption.

What to fix first

Practical priorities, with no doomsday thinking and no gear obsession.

It's free, and no email is needed to start.

[Take the free readiness assessment →](#)

Disclosure: the assessment is run by The Resilient Home, and this is an affiliate link. The assessment is free; if you later buy their optional plan, MyInfoLabs.com may earn a commission at no extra cost to you.

Also free: get ready for a blackout with [The 72-Hour Power Outage Checklist →](#), a room-by-room plan with 60+ check-off items.

Stay safe and stay prepared,

Uday Chandra

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This guide summarizes public guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Ready.gov. It is for general information only and does not replace instructions from your local water utility, health department, or emergency officials.