READY AT HOME · VOLUME 3

Water & Sanitation

Storing, treating, toilets

How much water to store, and how to keep it fresh
Filtering, boiling and disinfecting water you're unsure of
Toilets and hygiene when the taps stop



THE SERIES

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1. How much water you need

Plan on at least **3 litres per person per day** for drinking and food, plus more for washing. Children, nursing mothers, sick people and anyone working hard need more. Don't forget pets (roughly 50 ml per kg of dog per day).

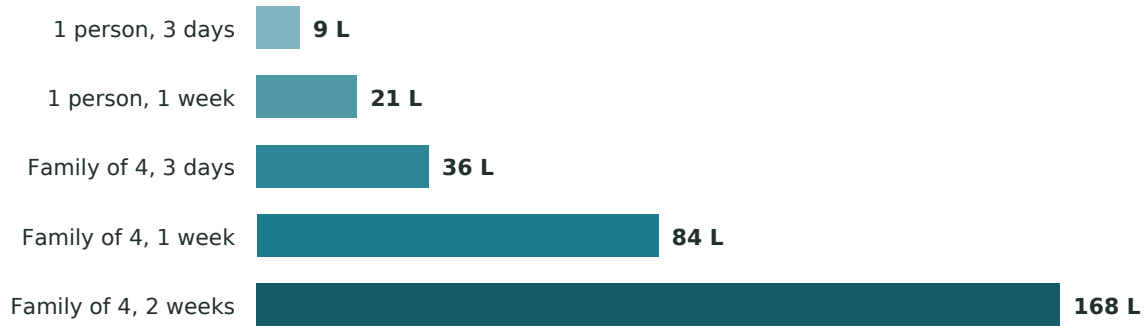


Figure 1. Drinking and cooking water only, at 3 L per person per day.

Why this matters more in rural Ireland

If your house is on a private well or a group scheme with an electric pump, a power cut is also a water cut. Electric showers, pressure pumps and some boilers stop too. Store water as if your taps will fail whenever the power does.

A simple home water store



For a family, two 20-litre food-grade water containers plus a gravity filter covers most outages and gives you a way to make more safe water once they run low.

- **2 × 20 L containers** (blue or white, marked food-grade or 'for drinking water'), with a tap. Fill from the mains, add a date label, and refresh every 6 months.
- Keep them somewhere cool and dark, off concrete, away from fuel and chemicals.
- A full 20 L container weighs 20 kg: keep them low down, where you'll use them.
- Add a crate of sealed bottled water for grab bags and the car.
- Know where your **stopcock** is (Volume 7). If pipes burst you'll want to close it fast; if you're on mains, also find the outside box near the boundary.



Gravity filters

A gravity filter (two stacked chambers: pour water in the top, clean water drips into the bottom) makes 10-20 litres a day with no power.

- Ceramic candle filters (e.g. Doulton/British Berkefeld) and 'Berkey'-style systems are common. Look for independent test results (e.g. NSF/ANSI 42, 53 or 401) rather than marketing claims.
- Most remove bacteria and parasites but not viruses. For rain, stream or flood-affected water, filter **and** then boil or use tablets.
- Prime and clean the elements as the instructions say, and keep a spare set.

Storing water

Option	Shelf life	Tips
Bottled water (sealed)	Use-by on bottle (often 1-2 years)	Easiest. Rotate: drink the oldest and replace.
Tap water in food-grade jerry cans	6 months	Wash containers with a little unscented bleach and rinse. Fill to the top, cap, date.
Large drums (25-200 L)	6-12 months	Food-grade only (blue drums). Use a siphon or tap. Keep off concrete floors.
Bath filled before a storm	Days	For flushing and washing, not drinking (unless the bath is spotless and you treat it).

- Store in the dark, away from fuel, paint and chemicals (plastic absorbs smells).
- Never reuse milk or juice cartons: they can't be cleaned well enough.
- Label every container with the fill date.

Hidden water already in your house



1. Turn off the immersion and boiler first.
2. Turn off the cold feed to the cylinder.
3. Attach a hose to the drain valve and run it into clean containers.
4. Let it cool; boil or filter before drinking.
5. Refill the cylinder before switching the heat back on.

Figure 2. A hot water cylinder can hold over 100 litres.

- The cold water tank in the attic (treat before drinking).
- Ice cubes and frozen bottles in the freezer.
- Liquid in tinned vegetables and fruit.
- Never drink from toilet bowls, radiators or the heating system: it's full of chemicals.

2. Making water safe

If the mains supply is affected, or you're using rain, stream or well water, treat it before drinking, brushing teeth, washing food or making baby bottles.

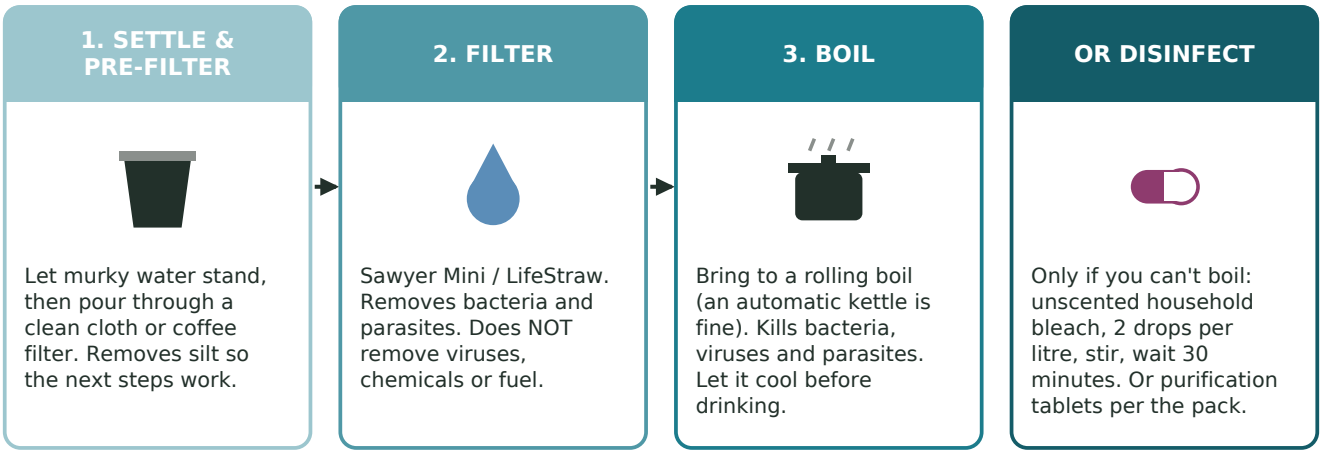


Figure 3. The treatment ladder. Filtering then boiling is the safest combination.

Using bleach correctly

- Use plain, unscented household bleach (sodium hypochlorite). No added cleaners, scents or 'thick' formulas.
- 2 drops per litre of clear water (4 drops if cloudy or very cold). Stir, wait 30 minutes.
- It should smell faintly of chlorine. If not, repeat and wait another 15 minutes.
- Bleach and filters don't remove chemicals, fuel or flood contamination. Don't drink flood water.



Boiling: a full rolling boil for 1 minute.



Stream water: collect from flowing water, pre-filter, then filter and boil.

Water purification tablets

- Chlorine dioxide tablets (e.g. Katadyn Micropur Forte, Aquatabs MicroPur) are the best all-round choice: they work against bacteria, viruses and most parasites.
- Follow the pack exactly; most need 30 minutes, some up to 4 hours for full protection against parasites.
- Iodine tablets are no longer recommended for regular use, and not at all in pregnancy or with thyroid conditions.

Using a Sawyer Mini or similar filter

1. Fill the squeeze pouch with the clearest water you can find (pre-filter through cloth if murky).
2. Screw on the filter. Squeeze clean water into a clean container, or drink through it.
3. Keep 'dirty' and 'clean' threads and containers separate.
4. Backflush with the syringe and clean water when the flow slows.
5. Don't let it freeze when wet: ice can crack the fibres invisibly. Keep it in a pocket in winter.

Water notices from Uisce Éireann

Notice	What it means	What to do
Boil Water Notice	Water may contain germs	Boil before drinking, brushing teeth, making ice or preparing food. Fine for washing and flushing.
Do Not Drink	Not safe to drink even if boiled	Use bottled water for drinking and food. Usually fine for washing and flushing.
Do Not Consume	Not safe to drink, cook with or wash food	Bottled water only for anything you eat or drink. Follow the notice's advice on washing.

Check water.ie or call 1800 278 278 for notices in your area.

Collecting rainwater



- Fit a water butt to a downpipe with a diverter kit (€30-60). In Ireland a 200 L butt can fill after a day or two of steady rain.
- Let the first few minutes of rain run to waste: it washes dust and droppings off the roof.
- Keep a lid on (mosquitoes, leaves, children).
- Untreated rainwater is ideal for flushing, washing clothes and cleaning.
- To drink it: filter, then boil or use tablets.

Condensation traps and solar stills



A clear plastic sheet over a pit or bowl, with a cup in the middle, collects water that evaporates and condenses. It does work, and it's a good thing to show children, but be realistic: in Irish weather expect a few hundred millilitres a day at best. Rain collection gives you far more for far less effort.

3. Toilets without running water

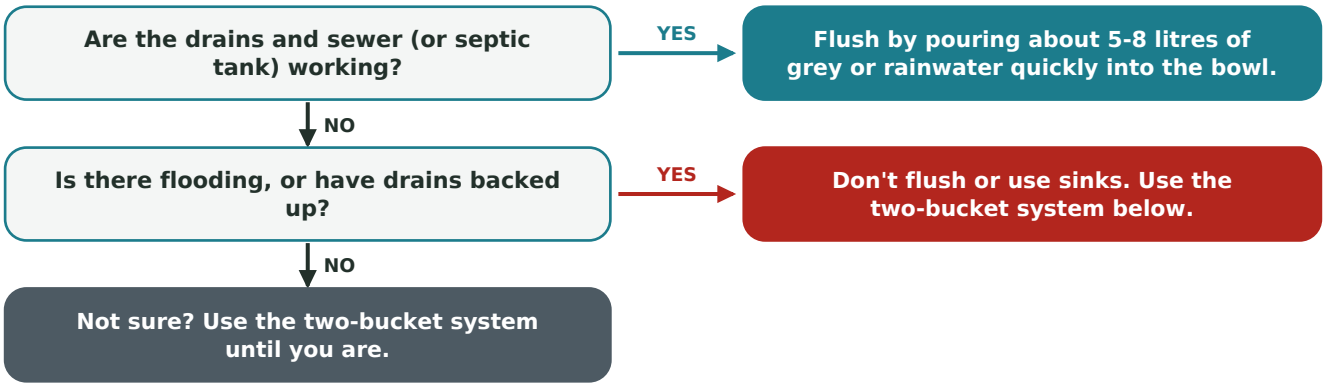


Figure 4. Can I still flush?

BUCKET 1: PEE



Empty down a drain or onto the garden, away from wells.

BUCKET 2: POO



Lined with 2 bin bags. Cover each use with a cup of sawdust, cat litter or shredded paper. Lid on.

Keeping pee separate means far less smell and fewer bags. Wash hands after every use.

Figure 5. The two-bucket toilet.

Toilet kit	Amount for a family of 4, 1 week
Two buckets with tight lids (or a camping toilet)	2
Heavy-duty bin bags	1 roll (20+)
Sawdust, cat litter or peat	1 large bag
Toilet roll	8-12 rolls
Disinfectant, gloves, hand sanitiser	1 each

- Tie off full bags, double-bag them and store in a lidded wheelie bin away from the house.
- Don't put human waste in a compost bin or bury it near a well, stream or vegetable patch.
- Babies' nappies: same as above. Store extra nappies and wipes.

4. Hygiene when water is short

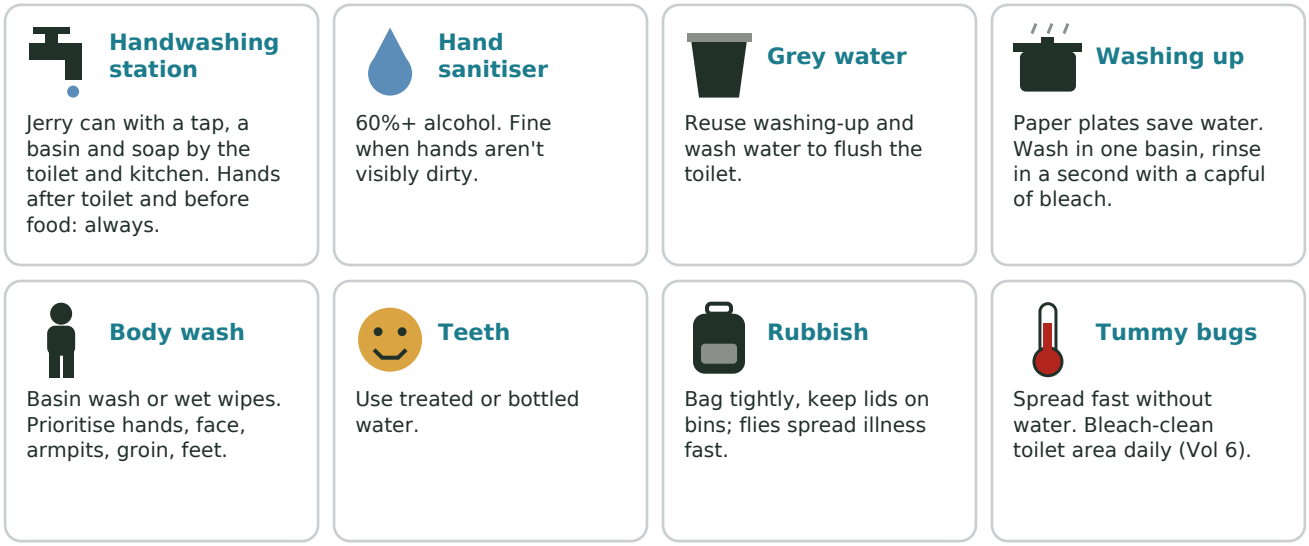


Figure 6. Staying clean on a few litres a day.

Emergency numbers & the series

Service	Number	Use it for
Emergency services	**112 or 999**	Ambulance, Garda, fire, coast guard. Works from any phone, any network.
ESB Networks	1800 372 999	Power cuts, fallen or damaged lines (24/7)
Gas Networks Ireland	1800 20 50 50	Smell of gas (24/7). Call from outside the house.
Uisce Éireann (Irish Water)	1800 278 278	Water outages, burst mains, boil-water notices
HSELive	1800 700 700	Health service information
Public Poisons Line	01 809 2166	Advice if someone has swallowed or touched something harmful (8am-10pm daily)
Samaritans	116 123	Anyone struggling to cope (24/7)
Text About It	Text HELLO to 50808	Free text support (24/7)
Childline	1800 66 66 66	Children and young people up to 18 (24/7)
Your county council	_____	Roads, flooding, local emergency centres
Met Éireann	met.ie / Met Éireann app	Weather warnings

Numbers checked November 2026. Write in your county council's number above, and your own local numbers (GP, out-of-hours doctor, pharmacy, vet, neighbours) in Volume 0.

The Ready At Home series

Vol	Title	What it covers
0	Start Here	Household plan & emergency numbers
1	Just Add Water	Home-dehydrated emergency meals
2	Power Cuts & Storms	Getting through long outages
3	**Water & Sanitation**	Storing, treating, toilets
4	Cooking & Warmth	Without mains power
5	First Aid	Step-by-step emergency care
6	Symptoms & Home Care	Red flags, minor illness, medicines
7	Home Systems & Repairs	Shut-offs, leaks, storm damage, floods
8	Fire Safety & Security	Alarms, escape plans, extinguishers
9	Communications	Family plan, radios, signals
10	Grab Bags & Kits	72-hour, car, child & pet kits
11	Pantry & Stockpile	A 30-day food store you rotate
12	Outdoor Skills	Fire, shelter, knots, navigation
13	Kids, Morale & Wellbeing	Keeping people okay
14	Offline Knowledge & Media	Libraries, maps & media without internet
15	Other Emergencies	Radiation, chemicals, heat, illness, cut off

This series gives general preparedness guidance. It is not a substitute for professional medical, electrical, gas or structural advice, or for a certified first-aid course. In an emergency, call 112 or 999 and follow the call-taker's instructions.

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