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HOT TIPS #97 DATE 12/07/2017

Please copy and distribute to ALL physicians at your location.

**HEALTH ADVISORY**

**Boil Water Orders and Surgical Procedures**

A number of areas within Ventura County are under **boil water orders** at this time. The reason these orders have been put in place is not because of water contamination with smoke and ash but because of power outages that have led to backflow problems and consequent concerns about drinking **water contamination**. This contamination could consist of any number of organisms but the presence of enteric organisms cannot be ruled out at this time.

Surgeons who are scrubbing in to a procedure, whether in the hospital or in a private office, are scrubbing up with this potentially contaminated water. Surgical scrubbing solutions (soap) has been tested against contaminated hands, but little attention has been paid to their efficacy in sterilizing contaminated water. The bacteria in contaminated water will be different than that found on hands.

Therefore, if you are scrubbing up to perform a sterile procedure and you are located in an area that is under a boiled water order, you should be using **sterile water**. Gallon or larger vessels of sterile water can be found in grocery stores and many pharmacies. To avoid using tap water of questionable sterility, have a nurse or other aid stand by the doctor and pour sterile water on his or her hands, following which the doctor will scrub up, and then this should be followed by pouring additional sterile water over the doctor's hands to rinse them off.

It is also important to remind hospitals that if they are under a boiled water order, they are **required to notify their regional office of Licensing and Certification immediately**.

The CDC article that addresses this issue is in the link below. See Table on page 64.

<https://www.cdc.gov/infectioncontrol/pdf/guidelines/environmental-guidelines.pdf>

Sincerely,

Robert M. Levin, MD  
Health Officer

-This bulletin is intended to improve the public health in our county by keeping physicians and nurses informed of noteworthy diagnoses, disease trends and other events of medical interest. Another goal of a public health department is to educate. We hope that you will use this information to increase your awareness. Please allow us to continue in our role of speaking to the press so that we may maximize the educational message to the benefit of all citizens of Ventura County.