

Press Release: 20 August 2007

HSE West advises that the Boil Water Notice to the area supplied by the Terryland Water Supply can be lifted with immediate effect.

People can now use tap water for drinking food preparation, ice making and teeth brushing without first boiling it, unless they are immuno-compromised and have had specific advice from their doctor.

The decision follows the installation, testing and commissioning of a ultraviolet light disinfection system at the Terryland water treatment plant where water is subjected to 3 separate treatment processes: chemical treatment, full filtration and UV disinfection. The UV disinfection is the largest of its kind in the country and provides an additional barrier against Cryptosporidium.

The Old Terryland water treatment plant is no longer in use and additional water is supplied to Galway City from Galway County Council's Luimnagh water treatment plant.

The Environmental Health Department has sent letters to managers of food premises, swimming pools, nursing homes and schools informing them that they no longer need to boil tap water and offering further advice on machinery and equipment where relevant. The Public Health Department has contacted GP's, Dentists, Pharmacists, Pre-schools, Schools, Hospital Managers & Public Health Nurses to advise them.

The Boil Water Notice covering Galway city and part of Galway County was issued on March 15th 2007 on the advice of the Health Service Executive West due to an outbreak of cryptosporidiosis in the area. A multiagency Incident Response Team was established at that time. The team includes representatives of the HSE, Galway City Council and Galway County Council. This group has met weekly since March and has worked very closely with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre.

Clear criteria were set by the HSE to lift the Boil Water Notice. The current situation with regard to these criteria is as follows:

Condition 1: There is a decline in human disease: a return to at least the low levels expected to be seen at this time of year.

Status: *The number of new cases of cryptosporidiosis has declined markedly to the levels expected.*

Condition 2: There is effective water treatment to remove cryptosporidium.

Status: *Galway City Council and Galway County Council have put in place improved water treatment measures to effectively remove cryptosporidium at the New Terryland and Luimnagh plants.*

Condition 3: There is clean water, safe for human consumption, with assurance that the system is robust and that the water is of acceptable quality.

Status: *An enhanced water testing programme has been in place: all results from both plants have been satisfactory.*

The total number of cases of cryptosporidiosis confirmed in County Galway since January 2007 is 242. Not all these cases will have been directly linked to the outbreak because a background level of the illness is found all year round, with seasonal increases in spring and autumn. On average three or four cases of cryptosporidiosis are confirmed each month in County Galway. This outbreak was identified when an increase in the number of cases notified above the expected was noted in March and rose rapidly over the following weeks. The Boil Water Notice was put in place in an attempt to limit the number of new cases. Because of the incubation period of the infection (2-4 weeks) and because people often have symptoms for several days before visiting the doctor, the effectiveness of the Boil Water Notice became apparent from early April onwards, when the numbers of new cases reported began to fall. The majority of the confirmed cases had *Cryptosporidium hominis*.

The risk of person-to-person spread from those who have become infected by *Cryptosporidium* still remains. People should continue to be especially thorough with their own hand washing, particularly after using the toilet or before preparing food. Infection spreads very easily between young children. Adults should continue to supervise toilet use and hand washing in this age group.

It is unlikely that a point source or sources of the outbreak will ever be identified. Detailed investigations have been conducted since the start of the outbreak and will continue, including finding out more about people who have contracted cryptosporidiosis, and laboratory studies on environmental samples.

Galway City Council and Galway County Council will provide a helpline for further questions relating to the water supply. This number is 091 536400 (office hours).

Food premises that require further information should contact eh HSE on 091 548 365 or 091 548381.

The HSE, Galway City Council and Galway County Council would like to thank the public for their patience and cooperation.

Contact details for further information:

HSE West: *Caitriona Meehan* (091 775474)

Galway City Council: *Máire Ní Mhulláin* (087754572)

Galway County Council: *Mark O'Donell* (091509214)