What does a boil water advisory mean?
This advisory is put into action when our public utility believes there is an actual or a strong possibility of bacterial contamination in the drinking water system that could make you sick.

Can I still use tap water?
“Yes, for certain things” is the short answer. When you are under a boil water advisory, using bottled water is always the best option.

Can I use tap water to brush my teeth?
No! Use bottled water or water that has been boiled or disinfected. You may want to use disposable toothbrushes.

How should I wash my hands during a boil water advisory?
Vigorous hand-washing with soap and your tap water is safe for basic personal hygiene. However, if you are washing your hands to prepare food or before eating, you should use boiled (then cooled), disinfected or bottled water with hand-washing soap. You may want to use antibacterial hand sanitizer after washing your hands.

How do I disinfect tap water so that’s it is safe to drink or to use to make other drinks?
The best method of treatment is to bring the water to a full rolling boil for at least one minute. If you cannot boil the water, you can add eight drops of plain, unscented household bleach per gallon of water. Thoroughly mix the solution and allow the water to stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy, repeat the process.

Can I use my coffee maker, ice machine, water or a soda dispenser?
Do not use them if they are directly connected to your water supply. Use bottled water or water that has been boiled or disinfected for making coffee and ice. Filters do not work for removing bacteria. Once the boil water advisory has been lifted, these devices should be cleaned, disinfected and flushed according to the operator’s manual for the device.

Is my tap water safe for washing dishes?
You may want to use disposable paper products and utensils. If you need to wash dishes, you should thoroughly rinse hand-washed dishes for a minute in a bleach solution (one tablespoon of bleach per gallon of water). Allow dishes to air dry completely. Most household dishwashers don’t reach the proper temperature to sanitize dishes.

Is my tap water safe for washing clothes?
It is safe to wash clothes in tap water.

Is potentially contaminated water safe for bathing and shaving?
Tap water may be used for showering, bathing, shaving and washing if absolutely necessary, but do not swallow any water or allow it to get in your eyes, nose or mouth. Stick to short showers and try to conserve as much water as possible. Though the risk of illness is minimal, individuals who have recent surgical wounds, have compromised immune systems or have a chronic illness may want to consider using bottled or boiled water for cleansing until the advisory is lifted.

What do I do with food and drink prepared during the advisory?
Throw away uncooked food, beverages or ice cubes if made or prepared using tap water during the day the advisory begins.

What if I have already consumed potentially contaminated water?
Even if you have consumed potentially contaminated water, the likelihood of becoming ill is low. Anyone experiencing symptoms such as diarrhea, nausea, vomiting or abdominal cramps (with or without fever) should contact his or her health care provider or the Thomson Student Health Center. Symptoms associated with waterborne illness are also associated with foodborne illness or even the common cold, so only a doctor can determine the source of your illness.

Why should I conserve water?
Conserving water will allow the Columbia water system recover more quickly.