

Health and Safety After a Flood

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Floodwaters often rise quickly and recede quickly, but the damage and potential danger they leave behind can linger. The best protection against floodwater is to avoid contact with it. However, that may not be possible.

Floodwater can carry bacteria, waste and contaminants that cause disease. People may be impacted by diarrheal illnesses, hepatitis A and parasites. There is also a small risk during widespread flooding for a bacterial disease called leptospirosis, which is caused by exposure to animal urine. Any illnesses should be immediately reported to your health care provider.

To protect yourself, avoid contact with the water when at all possible. Wear waterproof gloves, covered by puncture proof gloves to protect your hands from debris and from contaminants in the water. Wash your hands frequently with soap and clean water, especially after contact with floodwater or items contaminated by floodwater, and before eating or preparing food. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth until you have washed your hands with soap and clean water.

Dangers such as broken glass, exposed nails, jagged wood or metal and deep holes may also be lurking unseen beneath muddy floodwaters. The most common injury following a disaster is cut feet, so if you must walk in flood water, wear sturdy shoes or boots.

Consider being vaccinated against tetanus and Hepatitis A. Although studies show that risk and incidence of tetanus and hepatitis A are not increased after a flood, vaccinations against these illnesses are recommended at any time.

Mold can grow in buildings that are not dried out quickly. Only 48 hours after getting wet, a mattress or a couch can contain enough mold and fungi to present a health risk. People at highest risk are senior adults, young children, pregnant women and people with asthma, allergies, respiratory conditions or compromised immune systems. Throw away porous materials that have been saturated with floodwater and cannot be adequately cleaned and dried – such as carpet, upholstered furniture and mattresses. Scrub hard surfaces and items with warm water and laundry detergent. Rinse with clear water and then rinse again with a mixture of 1 gallon of water to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup household bleach. Leave that on for five minutes, rinse again with clear water and then allow it to dry completely or the mold and fungi will return. Wash clothing in hot soapy water.

Be aware that your water and septic systems may also have been impacted and may not be functioning properly. If you are on a private well, have your water tested by the local public health department to ensure it is safe to drink.

For more information on health and safety after a flood, contact your local public health department or visit <http://floodsafety.com>.