

Mission:

To protect, promote & improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county & community efforts.



Rick Scott
Governor

John H. Armstrong, MD, FACS
State Surgeon General & Secretary

Vision: To be the Healthiest State in the Nation

AVOIDING PUBLIC HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH FLOODING

Brooksville- The Florida Department of Health in Hernando County encourages residents impacted by flooding due to recent heavy rains to exercise caution to prevent illness and injury. Tips to keep families safe include:

Food safety: Preventing foodborne illness

- Individuals should not eat any food that may have come into contact with contaminated water from floods or tidal surges.
- Commercially prepared cans of food should not be eaten if there is a bulging or opening on the can or the screw caps, soda pop bottle tops, or twist-caps.
- Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if you remove the labels and then disinfect them in a solution Use ¼ cup of bleach in one gallon of water; re-label the cans including expiration date and type of food. Assume that home-canned food is unsafe.
- Infants should be fed only pre-prepared canned baby formula. Do not use powdered formulas prepared with treated water. Use sterile water when preparing formula.
- Frozen and refrigerated foods can be unsafe after hurricane. When the power is out, refrigerators will keep foods cool for only about four hours. Thawed food can usually be eaten only if it is still "refrigerator cold."
- When discarding raw or spoiled food products keep them separate from yard debris and/or construction materials. It may be a few days until these items can be picked up: raw garbage can create odors, attract insects and bugs which can serve as harmful vectors for disease. Place discarded raw food or spoiled foods into double bagged bags.

Sanitation and Hygiene: Preventing waterborne illness

- Basic hygiene is very important during this emergency period. Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected before eating, after toilet use, after participating in cleanup activities, and after handling articles contaminate the floodwater or sewage.
- Flooding that occurs after heavy rain may mean that water contains fecal matter from sewage systems, agricultural and industrial ways, and septic tanks. If you have open cuts or sores exposed to the floodwater, keep them as clean as possible by washing them with soap and clean water. Apply antibiotic ointment to reduce the risk of infection. If a wound or sore develops redness, swelling or drainage, see a physician.
- Do not allow children to play in floodwater. They can be exposed to water contaminated with fecal matter. Do not allow children to play with toys that been in floodwater until the toys have been disinfected. Use ¼ cup of bleach in one gallon of water.

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- If you get your drinking water from a private well and you live in an area that has experienced flooding:
 - Disinfect your well using the procedures available from your local health department, or provided on the MyFlorida website at: <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/environment/water/manual/floodinf.htm>; and
- Have your water tested by your local health department, or by a laboratory certified by the State to do drinking water analyses.
- If your water system is under a boil water notice:
 - Boil the water before drinking, holding it in a rolling boil for one minute, or
 - Disinfect it by adding 8 drops of plain unscented household bleach per gallon of water, and then let it stand for 30 minutes (you can estimate 8 drops by pouring a dime-sized puddle in the bleach bottle cap). If the water is cloudy after 30 minutes, repeat the procedure; or
 - Use bottled water for drinking.

If Your Home is served by a Septic Tank:

- If your plumbing is functioning slowly, you should conserve water as much as possible. Minimize the use of washing machines and flush toilets only as necessary. Utilize portable toilets where provided. Fix any plumbing leaks as soon as possible.
- **DO NOT** have your septic tank pumped until the soil surrounding the tank is dry. When the ground is saturated with water, the tank might collapse if it is pumped dry. If the problem is the high water table, pumping the tank will not help.
- Do not have your septic system repaired until the ground has dried up. Septic systems are generally functional once flood waters go down. Remember - if your system was damaged, repairs must be permitted and inspected by the county health department.

How to Clean Up Sewage-Contaminated Items:

- Walls, hard-surfaced floors, and many other household surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water and optionally disinfected with a solution of ¼ cup of bleach to one gallon of water. Do not mix ammonia cleansers with bleach as toxic vapors will form. Wash all linens and clothing in hot water, or dry clean them. Items that cannot be washed or dry cleaned, such as mattresses, carpeting and upholstered furniture, should be discarded. Protective clothing such as rubber boots and waterproof gloves should be worn during cleanup. Remove and discard contaminated household materials that cannot be disinfected, such as wall coverings, cloth, rugs, and drywall. Once cleanup is complete it is important to dry out affected items to prevent the growth of mold.

To Protect Against Health Risks Associated with Mold:

- Remove standing water from your home or office.
- Remove wet materials.
- If mold growth has already occurred, carefully remove or clean the moldy material.
- Consider using personal protective equipment when cleaning or removing mold – gloves, goggles and an N-95 particle respirator (found at most local hardware stores). Check with a health care provider before wearing a respirator. Do not use a respirator if you have heart disease or chronic lung disease such as asthma or emphysema.
- Individuals with known mold allergies or asthma should not clean or remove moldy materials.

Power Outages: Preventing fire hazards

- Using battery-powered lanterns and flashlights is preferable.
- If you must use candles, make sure you put them in safe holders away from curtains, paper, wood, or other flammable items.

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- Until your electrical service is restored, protect yourself from carbon monoxide (CO):
 - Do not burn charcoal or gas grills inside a house, garage, vehicle, tent or fireplace.
 - Do not use gas-powered generators or pressure washers indoors, not even in the garage.
 - If you suspect you are experiencing any symptoms of CO poisoning, open doors and windows, turn off gas appliances and go outside. **In cases of severe CO poisoning, call 911 emergency services or the Florida Poison Information Center at 1-800-222-1222.**
 - For more information about indoor air quality, contact the Florida Department of Health's Indoor Air Toxics Hotline at 800-543-8279 or visit the Department of Health website at www.doh.state.fl.us.

Clearing Standing Water: Preventing Mosquito-borne Illness

- Heavy rains and flooding can lead to an increase in mosquitoes. Mosquitoes are most active at sunrise and sunset. Public-health authorities will be working actively to control the spread of any diseases transmitted by mosquitoes.
- To protect against mosquitoes, DOH urges the public to remain diligent in their personal mosquito protection efforts. These should include the 5 D's for prevention:
 - **Dusk and Dawn** -- Avoid being outdoors when mosquitoes are seeking blood, for many species this is during the dusk and dawn hours.
 - **Dress** -- Wear clothing that covers skin.
 - **DEET** -- When the potential exists for exposure to mosquitoes, repellents containing DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide, or N,N-diethyl-3-methylbenzamide) are recommended. Products with concentrations up to 30% DEET are generally recommended for most situations. (It is not recommended to use DEET on children less than 2 months old. Instead, infants should be kept indoors or mosquito netting used over carriers when mosquitoes are present). If additional protection is necessary, apply a permethrin repellent directly to your clothing. Always read the manufacturer's directions carefully before you put on a repellent.
 - **Drainage** -- Check your home to rid it of standing water in which mosquitoes can lay their eggs.

Tips on Eliminating Mosquito Breeding Sites

- Clean out eaves, troughs and gutters.
- Remove old tires or drill holes in those used in playgrounds to drain.
- Turn over or remove empty plastic pots.
- Pick up all beverage containers and cups.
- Check tarps on boats or other equipment that may collect water.
- Pump out bilges on boats.
- Replace water in birdbaths and pet or other animal feeding dishes at least once a week.
- Change water in plant trays, including hanging plants, at least once a week.
- Remove vegetation or obstructions in drainage ditches that prevent the flow of water.

Animal Bite Prevention:

- Caution and alertness around unfamiliar animals is always a good idea. In general, do not approach animals, particularly wild or injured animals. If you are bitten, wash the wound thoroughly and contact your health care provider and animal control.
- A walking stick 5 to 6 feet long may be an effective tool for keeping animals at bay while working your way toward a vehicle or other means of escape.
- A walking stick is also good for moving objects which might hide a snake, scorpion or spider.

For further information, please contact Environmental Manager Al Gray at the Florida Department of Health in Hernando County at 540-6800 (x 82102).

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