



Factsheet: Floods

The Houston Health Department (HHD) offers the following precautions to be taken in flooding situations.

Water:

Watch for news media announcements about the safety of public drinking water supplies. Follow “boil water” alerts that may be issued by local water utilities or the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Do not drink water from unknown sources.

People under “boil water” alerts and people with private wells that may have been contaminated by floodwater should use only bottled, boiled or treated water until water has been tested and found safe.

If you boil water for drinking purposes, allow it to boil for at least one minute. Water also may be disinfected with chlorine or iodine (follow package directions) or with ordinary household bleach – one-eighth teaspoon (about eight drops) per gallon of water. Sterilize water containers and drinking vessels with a solution of household bleach.

Food:

Do not eat food that has been in contact with floodwater.

If electricity has been off, refrigerated food may have spoiled. Discard any food that has been at room temperature for more than two hours or that has an unusual odor or color. Thawed food from freezers may be safe for consumption or refreezing if it is still partially frozen or is “refrigerator cold.”

Infants on formula should be given ready- to-feed formula or powdered formula prepared with bottled drinking water.

Wash hands with soap and disinfected water before eating or handling food, after clean-up work and after handling floodwater-contaminated items.

Environmental Hazards:

Snakes and other wildlife may seek shelter in trees, homes and vehicles during floods. Bats are often injured in heavy rains and winds. Do not handle wildlife. Seek immediate treatment if bitten or injured by an animal. Beware of displaced pets.

Return home in daylight for best visibility and to avoid using unsafe power sources. Do not use lanterns or torches until the premises inspected and are safe from gas leaks.

Standing water after floods is a breeding place for mosquitoes. Drain all standing water and empty water from outdoor items such as old tires, cans and flower pot bases. Protect yourself with an appropriate insect repellent containing DEET.

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Do not let anyone enter your home while flooded unless the main electrical switch has been turned off.

Wear shoes in post-flood areas to reduce the chances of punctures or cuts from nails and other sharp contaminated objects.

Medical:

People with puncture wounds or cuts exposed to floodwater could be at risk of contracting tetanus and may need to have a tetanus shot to prevent infection.

General:

Do not allow children to play in or near floodwater or storm drains.

Disinfect all furniture, woodwork and other household surfaces in homes that have flooded.

Wash hands frequently during cleanup to lessen recontamination of cleaned areas.

To prevent allergic reactions and other health problems caused by mold, replace porous wallboard (from at least 12 inches above the waterline) that has been flood- damaged.

Disinfect children’s toys with a solution of one cup bleach to five gallons of water.

To prevent producing toxic fumes, do not mix bleach with products that contain ammonia.

To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, do not burn charcoal or use gasoline- powered generators or pumps indoors.

Try to rest and conserve energy and avoid heat stress. People with heart conditions and other illnesses should avoid strenuous exertion.

Remain calm. Signs of anger and depression are normal under catastrophic conditions. Sensitivity to the stress felt by yourself and others can help restore calm.

Questions:

Contact your local health department or DSHS regional office if you have questions about food safety, sanitation procedures or how to have private well- water tested.

For More Information:

Drinking Water: Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

Floods: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

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