



# During and After a Flood

Information adapted from South Central Public Health District

## If there is water standing in my yard, should I be concerned about well contamination?

Providing the well is properly constructed, sealed to a confining layer and water has not risen above the well head, it should be safe to drink. If you have a concern about well construction and the water has been sitting for a prolonged period of time, a water sample must be taken to a certified lab for testing. The lab will provide you with the proper sample bottles and instructions on how to sample.

## What should I do if my well is contaminated?

If your well head was under water, the well must be considered contaminated as vent holes are not designed to keep water out. After flood water recedes, samples must be taken to determine the level of contamination. Contact your local Health District Office for instructions on treatment.

## If I can't flush my toilet, does it mean my septic tank is flooded?

Discontinue use of your private sewage system. When necessary, shut off power to a sewage lift pump if you have one in the house or in a pump chamber (mound, in-ground pressure, at-grade systems).

If your home site was under water, the drain field is most likely saturated with water. Don't flush or use your toilet as the water has no where to go. The septic tank should be pumped out as soon as you can after there is no longer standing water over the tank. This will assist the drain field to dry so it can take water from your septic tank.

## What should I do if my septic tank is overflowing?

Do not use your septic tank if it is overflowing. Arrange for your septic tank to be pumped as soon as you can after there is no longer standing water over the tank. If the drain field continues to flow out after the surrounding area has dried out, your drain field has most likely failed. Contact your local District Health office where an Environmental Health Specialist can assist you.

## How to Purify Drinking Water / Water Use Do's and Don'ts

- Bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute will kill most organisms.
- If you use household chlorine bleach, add 1/8 teaspoon of bleach per gallon of water if the water is clear. For cloudy water, add 1/4 teaspoon of bleach per gallon. Mix the solution thoroughly and let it stand for about 30 minutes before using it.
- Listen for public announcements on the safety of the municipal water supply. **Flooded, private water wells will need to be tested and disinfected after flood waters recede.**
- Safe water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene includes bottled, boiled, or treated water.
- **Do not use contaminated water** to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula. If possible, use baby formula that does not need to have water added.
- **If you use bottled water, be sure it came from a safe source.** If you do not know that the water came from a safe source, you should boil or treat it before you use it. Use only bottled, boiled, or treated water until your supply is tested and found safe.
- Boiling water, when practical, is the preferred way to kill harmful bacteria and parasites. Bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute will kill most organisms.
- **When boiling water is not practical, you can treat water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or unscented household chlorine bleach** (5.25% sodium hypochlorite):
  - If you use chlorine tablets or iodine tablets, follow the directions that come with the tablets.
  - If you use household chlorine bleach, add 1/8 teaspoon of bleach per gallon of water if the water is clear. For cloudy water, add 1/4 teaspoon of bleach per gallon. Mix the solution thoroughly and let it stand for about 30 minutes before using it.
  - Note: Treating water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or liquid bleach will not kill parasitic organisms.

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## How to Avoid Illness

- Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected before preparing or eating food, after toilet use, after participating in flood cleanup activities, and after handling articles contaminated with flood water or sewage.
- If you receive a puncture wound or a wound contaminated with feces, soil, or saliva, have a doctor or health department determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary.
- You can also use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to wash your hands.

## How to Make Sure Your Food is Safe

- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water.
- For infants, use only pre-prepared canned baby formula that requires no added water, rather than powdered formulas prepared with treated water.
- Thawed food can usually be eaten or refrozen if it is still "refrigerator cold," or if it still contains ice crystals. To be safe, remember, "When in doubt, throw it out."
- Discard any refrigerated or frozen food that has been at room temperature for two hours or more, and any food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture.

## How to Deal With Animals

- Wild animals may be forced from their natural habitats by flooding, and many domestic animals are also without homes after flooding.
- Take care to avoid these animals. Do not corner an animal.
- If an animal must be removed, contact your local animal control authorities.
- If you are bitten by any animal, seek immediate medical attention. If you are bitten by a snake, first try to accurately identify the type of snake so that, if poisonous, the correct anti-venom may be administered.
- Contact local or state health and agricultural officials for state guidelines on disposal of dead animals. The number for Fish and Game in the Southwest Region is 465-8465.

## How to Deal With Electric and Gas Utilities

- Electrical power and natural gas or propane tanks should be shut off to avoid fire, electrocution, or explosions until it is safe to use them.
- Use battery-powered flashlights and lanterns, rather than candles, gas lanterns, or torches.
- If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open all windows, and leave the house immediately. Notify the gas company (Emergency Number: 1-800-548-3679) or the police or fire departments (911), and do not turn on the lights or do anything that could cause a spark.
- Avoid any downed power lines, particularly those in water.
- All electrical equipment and appliances must be completely dry before returning them to service. It is advisable to have a certified electrician check these items if there is any question.
- Also, remember not to operate any gas-powered equipment indoors.

## Contact CDHD

If you have questions, please contact Environmental Health at Central District Health Department  
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