



Health Risks After A Flood

Tips on How to Protect Your Family



Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department

www.austintexas.gov/health

Food Safety: Preventing Foodborne Diseases

- People 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 screw caps, soda bottle tops or twist-caps.
- Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if labels are removed and cans are disinfected in a bleach solution. Use 1/4 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water; re-label the cans including expiration date and type of food. Assume that home-canned food is unsafe.
- Infants should preferably be breast fed or fed only pre-mixed canned baby formula. Do not use powdered formulas prepared with untreated water, use boiled water instead.
- When the power is out, refrigerators will keep foods cool for approximately 4 hours. Thawed and refrigerated foods should be thrown out after 4 hours.

Sanitation and Hygiene: Preventing Waterborne Illness

- Basic hygiene is very important during this emergency period. Always wash your hands with soap and water. Use only water that has been boiled or disinfected for washing hands before eating, after toilet use, after helping in cleanup activities and after handling items contaminated by floodwater or sewage.
- Flood water may contain fecal matter from sewage systems, agricultural and industrial waste 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 disinfected or boiled water.
- Apply antibiotic cream 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 have been in floodwater until the toys have been disinfected. Use 1/4 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water to disinfect toys and other items.

Power Outages: Preventing Fire Hazards

- Using battery-powered lanterns and flashlights is preferred.
- NEVER use candles.

Post Flood Clean-up

- Clean up debris carefully to avoid injury and contamination.
- Chainsaws should only be operated in safe conditions (not in water soaked areas) and by people who are experienced in proper use.
- Lift heavy debris by bending knees and using legs to help lift.
- Wear shoes to avoid injury to the feet from glass, nails or other sharp objects.
- Avoid contact with downed power lines.
- Be alert to wildlife (snakes, alligators, etc.) that may have been displaced as a result of the flood or storm. If you see a snake or other wildlife, back away from it slowly and do not touch it. If the snake is in your home, immediately call the animal control agency in your county.

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.

To protect against mosquitoes, HHSD urges the public to remain thorough in their personal mosquito protection efforts by following the suggestions below:

DRAIN standing water:

- Drain water from garbage cans, buckets, pool covers, coolers, toys, flowerpots or any other containers where sprinkler or rainwater has collected.
- Discarded old tires, drums, bottles, cans, pots and pans, broken appliances and other items that aren't being used.
- Empty and clean birdbaths and pet's water bowls at least once or twice a week.
- Protect boats and vehicles from rain with tarps that don't accumulate water.
- Maintain swimming pools in good condition and appropriately chlorinated. Empty plastic swimming pools when not in use.

COVER your skin with:

- **CLOTHING** - If you must be outside when mosquitoes are active, cover up. Wear shoes, socks, long pants and long sleeves.
- **REPELLENT** - Apply mosquito repellent to bare skin and clothing. Always use repellents according to the label. Repellents with 10-30 percent DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, and IR3535 are effective.
- Use mosquito netting to protect children younger than 2 months old.

COVER doors and windows with screens:

- Keep mosquitoes out of your house. Repair broken screening on windows, doors, porches and patios.

Tips on Repellent Use

- Always read label directions carefully for the approved usage before applying a repellent to skin. Some repellants are not suitable for children.
- Products with concentrations of up to 30 percent DEET are generally recommended.
- Other potential mosquito repellents, as reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in June 2007, contain picaridin or oil of lemon eucalyptus. These products are generally available at local pharmacies. Look for active ingredients to be listed on the product label.
- Apply insect repellent to exposed skin, or onto clothing, but not under clothing. In protecting children, read label instructions to be sure the repellent is age-appropriate.
- According to the CDC, mosquito repellents containing oil of lemon eucalyptus should not be used on children under the age of 3 years. DEET is not recommended on children younger than 2 months old.
- Infants should be kept indoors or mosquito netting should be used over carriers when mosquitoes are present.
- Avoid applying repellents to the hands of children. Adults should apply repellent first to their own hands and then transfer it to the child's skin and clothing.
- If additional protection is necessary, apply a permethrin repellent directly to your clothing. Again, always follow the manufacturer's directions.

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.

