

FLOOD WATERS POSE HEALTH RISKS



Tropical storms and hurricanes can cause flooding. Although skin contact with flood waters does not, by itself, pose a serious health risk, health hazards are a concern when waters become contaminated. Flood waters may contain fecal material, associated bacteria and viruses.

The Florida Department of Health in Lee County recommends the following precautions to prevent possible illness from flood waters:

- Basic hygiene is critical. 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.
- Avoid eating or drinking anything that has been contaminated with flood waters.
- Do not wade through standing water. If you do, bathe and put on clean clothes as soon as possible.
- Avoid contact with flood waters if you have open cuts or sores. If you have any open cuts or sores and cannot avoid contact with flood waters, keep them as clean as possible by washing well with soap to control infection. If a wound develops redness, swelling, or drainage, seek immediate medical attention. Residents who sustain lacerations and/or puncture wounds and have not had a tetanus vaccination within the past 10 years require a tetanus booster.
- If there is a backflow of sewage into your house, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Remove and discard absorbent household materials, such as wallcoverings, cloth, rugs, and sheetrock. Clean walls and hard-surfaced floors with soap and water and disinfect with a solution of 1/4 cup of bleach to one gallon of water. Thoroughly disinfect food contact surfaces (counter tops, refrigerators, tables) and areas where small children play. Wash all linens and clothing in hot water. Air dry larger items in the sun and spray them with a disinfectant. Steam clean all carpeting.

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If your plumbing is functioning slowly or sluggishly, you should:

- Conserve water as much as possible; the less water used the less sewage the septic tank must process. Minimize use of your washing machine. Go to a laundromat. Rental of a portable toilet for a temporary period may be another option.
- Do not have the septic tank pumped. Exceptionally high water tables might crush a septic tank that was pumped dry, or cause it to float, which would damage the inlet and outlet pipes. If the fundamental problem is high ground water, pumping the tank does nothing to solve that problem.
- If you cannot use your plumbing without creating a sanitary nuisance, i.e., without sewage being exposed, consider moving to a new location until conditions improve.
- Do not have the septic tank and drainfield repaired until the ground has dried. Often systems are completely functional when unsaturated conditions return. Any repair must be permitted and inspected by your county health department.

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