

Take Precautions During and After Flooding Courtesy of Washington State Department of Health

OLYMPIA, March 19, 1997 -- Drowning has been the number one cause of deaths related to flooding in Washington this year, according to the state Department of Health. The best way to prevent harm during a flood is to be prepared with information and supplies.

Remember that flood conditions change rapidly and severe flooding can develop in minutes. Flood water levels can be much deeper than they appear. The depth of water may be difficult to assess. Only two feet of water can cause a car to be swept away, and as little as six inches can cause unstable footing.

"Never assume the situation is safe," said Eric Slagle, assistant secretary of environmental health at state Department of Health. "Do not walk or drive through flood waters. More people drown in their cars during a flood than anywhere else."

Floods and storms can also knock down power lines. If you lose power, never use a gas oven, range, barbecue, hibachi or portable propane heater to heat your home. These units give off deadly carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide poisoning has caused several deaths during previous storms this year.

If you see downed power lines, do not try to repair or grab them. Even when flood water levels appear to have subsided, electrical currents can travel through the remaining water for more than 100 yards. Contact your utility company or police department to report downed power lines.

If your well has been flooded, assume the water in your home has been contaminated. If you are on a public water system, listen to your radio and television for news from public health departments to find out if your water is contaminated. If water is contaminated, bottled water is the best choice. If you can, get commercially bottled water that has been stored for less than 6 months in tightly sealed containers. Plan for one gallon per person per day.

Flood waters may carry silt, raw sewage, oil or chemical waste. Wash your hands frequently with soap and disinfected water to prevent spread of disease. This should be done before preparing or eating food, after toilet use, and after flood clean up when your hands may have touched articles contaminated from water or sewage. When in doubt, throw out fresh, frozen or dry food, such as cereal, that may have been in contact with the water.

If you can, wear gloves and boots at all times to avoid touching anything with bare hands or feet. Parents should not allow children to play in flood areas and should ensure that their children wash hands often.

To be better prepared for an emergency, keep a battery operated radio and a flashlight on hand. For more information, contact your local health department or emergency management agency.

IF YOUR HOME IS FLOODED

- Be sure utilities are off. Don't turn them on until notified.
- Avoid weakened structures, particularly floors, walls and rooftops to avoid structural damage.
- Do not pump basement out until flood water recedes.

DRINKING WATER

If your well has been flooded, assume the water in your home has been contaminated. Follow the directions on the right side of this page to disinfect your well.

If you are on public water, your local health jurisdiction will let you know, through local media, if your water is not safe to drink.

Bottled water is the best choice. If you can, get commercially bottled water that has been stored for less than 6 months in tightly sealed containers. Plan for one gallon per person per day.

If the water from your tap is clear-

- Boil it for 3 minutes to disinfect. This kills disease-causing bacteria and parasites, or
- Add 1/8 teaspoon household bleach per gallon of water. Let it sit for 1/2 hour.

If water is cloudy -

- Filter it by pouring it thru a coffee filter and then boil it for 3 minutes.
- If you can't boil it, filter it and add 1/4 teaspoon of household bleach per gallon of water. Let it sit for 1 hour.

CLEAN-UP/HYGIENE

- Wash your hands often using soap and disinfected water.
- Make sure hands are washed:
 - when preparing or eating food.
 - after using the toilet
 - during and after handling contaminated items in flood cleanup activities.
- Wear gloves and boots. Do not touch anything with bare hands. Be careful not to step on glass.

TOILET

Until sewage disposal systems are back to normal, use any large container lined with a plastic bag and covered with a tight-fitting lid, as a temporary toilet.

Add: 1/4 cup of unscented chlorine bleach or disinfectant after each use to kills germs and stop odor.

ANIMALS

Do not trap or corner wild animals. Sick or injured animals may be dangerous.

FOOD

- Throw out fresh or frozen food that has come into contact with flood water.
- Throw out food that has not been properly refrigerated-
- "If in doubt...throw it out!"
- Undamaged canned goods are o.k. but before opening disinfect cans in a dilute bleach solution.

BUILDING CLEANUP:

- Wear waterproof boots and gloves. Open all doors and windows. Use fans is possible to air out the building.
- First: clean walls, hard surfaced floors and household surfaces with soap and water. Make sure dirt and mud are gone.
- Then, wipe everything down with solution of one cup household bleach to disinfect. Wash all clothes and linens in hot water. Throw away mattresses and stuffed furniture. It cannot be adequately cleaned, even with steam.

HOW TO DISINFECT A WELL

Use bleach to disinfect. Follow the instructions below for dug or drilled wells to determine how much bleach to use. If you know how much water is in your well, add bleach for that amount of water. If you don't know, add bleach amount for the depth of your well.

DUG WELLS: Make a solution of bleach water using the amounts of bleach and water shown below. Pour bleach in 10 gallons of water. Mix thoroughly. Splash on casing inside well. Seal top. Open faucet. Let run until you can smell bleach at the faucet. Close faucets. Let set overnight. Next day, open faucets. Let water run slowly until bleach smell is gone. Add bleach as follows:

Diameter of well	Add bleach
is 4 ft.	3 cups per ft. of water
is 6 ft.	6 cups per ft. of water
is 8 ft.	12 cups per ft. water

Example: If a well has a diameter of 6 feet, is 15 feet deep, and has 5 feet of water in it, add 30 cups of bleach. (6 cups x 5 feet of water).

DRILLED WELLS: Make a solution of bleach water using the amounts of bleach and water shown below. Remove the well seal. Pour the bleach solution into the well. Connect hose and spray inside of well casing for 15 minutes. Turn on water taps in house. Let it run until you can smell bleach at faucets. Turn water off. Let stand overnight. Next day, open faucets. Let water run slowly until bleach smell is gone.

To make bleach solution: Find out how many gallons of water are in your well. For every 100 gallons of water in your well, add a mixture of: 3 cups bleach in 10 gallons of water.

If well diameter is	It holds this much water
6 inches	1.5 gallons water per foot
8 inches	2.5 gallons water per foot
10 inches	4 gallons water per foot
12 inches	6 gallons of water per foot

If well has	Add/Mix
150 gal. water	4.5 cups bleach in 15 gal. water
50 gal. water	1.5 cups bleach in 5 gal. water

FOR SAFETY

After you disinfect your well, have a sample of your tap water tested at your local health department. Before you drink the water, make sure 2 samples are rated satisfactory, to ensure it is safe and free of contamination.

CARS

Never try to drive through floodwater. Water can be deeper than it appears, and water levels can rise very quickly. If a car stalls in floodwater, get out quickly and move to higher ground.

CARBON MONOXIDE

If you lose power during or after a flood, NEVER USE a gas oven, range, barbecue, hibachi or portable propane heater to heat your home. These units use up the oxygen you need to breathe and give off deadly carbon monoxide which have caused people to die from suffocation.