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Flood Waters Pose Health Risks



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Viera, FL — Skin contact with flood waters does not, by itself, pose a serious health risk. However, health hazards are a concern when waters are or become contaminated with bacteria and viruses.

The Florida Department of Health in Brevard County (DOH-Brevard) recommends the following precautions to prevent possible illness from flood waters:

- Basic hygiene is critical. Wash your hands with soap and either disinfected or boiled and cooled water, especially before preparing or eating food, after toilet use, after handling a soiled diaper, after participating in flood cleanup activities and after handling objects contaminated with flood water or sewage.
- Use commercially-bottled water for mixing baby formula.
- Avoid eating or drinking anything that has been contaminated with flood waters.

To be safe, you can disinfect tap water using the procedures below. Do not rely on unverified methods for decontaminating water. If water is cloudy, let it settle and filter it through a clean cloth, paper towel or coffee filter. This will help the disinfection process. If you have any extra water, put it in containers that were properly disinfected (see information below water disinfection).

The preferred method to disinfect water is to Boil Water.

- Bring water to a rolling boil for at least one minute to kill harmful bacteria and parasites.
- To improve the flat taste of boiled water, add one pinch of salt (depending upon health conditions) to each quart or liter of water, or pour the water from one clean container to another clean container several times.

If boiling is not possible, use Household Bleach.

- Add eight drops of plain unscented household bleach (four to six percent strength), which is about 1/8 teaspoon or a dime sized puddle, per gallon of water.
 - Do not use color safe bleach or bleaches with added cleaners.
- If a higher strength bleach is used (up to 8.25 percent strength), only add six drops of bleach.
- Mix the solution and let it stand for 30 minutes.
- If the water is cloudy after 30 minutes, repeat the procedure one time.

- If the chlorine taste is too strong, pour the water from one clean container to another and let stand for a few hours before use.

It is also possible to use other Disinfection Methods.

Note: Follow the instructions on the product label as each product may have a different strength.

- Five drops of Iodine (two percent tincture) can be added to each quart or liter of water to be disinfected.

Note: Per the [CDC](#), water that has been disinfected with iodine is NOT recommended for pregnant women, people with thyroid problems, those with known hypersensitivity to iodine or for continuous use for more than a few weeks at a time.

- If the water is cloudy or colored add 10 drops of iodine.
- Stir and let the water stand for at least 30 minutes before use.
- Water disinfection tablets (available at sporting goods departments or stores) that contain chlorine, iodine, chlorine dioxide or other disinfecting agents may also be used.

Containers for water should be rinsed with a bleach solution of one tablespoon of bleach per gallon of water before reusing them.

Do not wade through standing water. If you do, wash your body and put on clean clothes.

Avoid contact with flood waters, especially if you have open cuts or sores.

- If you have any open cuts or sores and come in contact with flood waters, wash the area well with soap to prevent infection. If a wound develops redness, swelling or drainage, seek immediate medical attention.
- Residents who sustain lacerations and/or puncture wounds, are encouraged to contact their primary health care provider to make sure they are current on their tetanus vaccine and possibly get a booster.
- If sewage backs up into your house, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup.
 - Absorbent household materials, such as cloth wall coverings, rugs and drywall, should be removed and discarded since they cannot be properly disinfected.
 - Hard-surfaced walls and floors, food contact surfaces, such as counter tops, refrigerators and tables, and areas where children play should be cleaned with soap and water, followed by a disinfecting solution of 1/4 cup of bleach to one gallon of water.
 - All linens and clothing should be cleaned in hot water or dry cleaned, while carpeting should be steam cleaned if not replaced.
 - For larger items, air dry them in the sun, followed by spraying them with a disinfectant.

If your home is served by a septic tank and your plumbing is functioning slowly or sluggishly, you should:

- Conserve water as much as possible. If you use less water, you will increase the chance of not having any septic problems. This would include reducing the use of your washing machine by going to a laundromat. Also, consider using a portable restroom.
- **Do not** have the septic tank pumped. Exceptionally high water tables might crush a septic tank that was pumped dry, or it could pop out of the ground. If the main problem is high ground water, pumping the tank will not solve that problem.

- If you cannot use your plumbing without creating a sanitary nuisance, such as sewage on top of the ground, consider renting a portable restroom for a temporary period, or moving to a new location until conditions improve.
- **Do not** have the septic tank and drainfield repaired until the ground water has receded below the bottom of the drainfield. Often, systems will function properly again when dry conditions return. Any repair must be permitted and inspected by DOH-Brevard.

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