

Floods

A flood is a dramatic event that can have a severe physical impact on a community. The disaster can be complicated by many health concerns. This fact sheet provides information about preventing diseases and injuries after a flooding event.

Is my drinking water safe?

After a flooding event, as long as water system pressure has been maintained, drinking water from the tap is safe. If there has been a loss of pressure, the public water system will notify the affected public. This is usually done through the media by issuing a boil water notice. However, it is important to note that if flood levels were high enough to cover faucets, then the faucets themselves may have become contaminated. In this case, faucets, sinks, tubs, etc. need to be decontaminated.

To treat potentially contaminated drinking water, only a rolling boil for three minutes will kill all potentially harmful organisms. Camping type filters with pore sizes of one micron or less are effective for removing parasites; however, they will not remove viruses. Consequently, water filtered in this manner still needs boiling, unless the filter used incorporates some type of chemical treatment such as iodine-impregnated disks.

If you feel that your drinking water may be unsafe, contact the Scott Candler Filter Plant Laboratory at 770-936-5400, ext. 245.

Is my food safe?

Any food that has come in contact with flood water should be thrown away. This includes meat and meat products, fruits, vegetables, boxed food and bottled drinks. You also should throw away all medicines, cosmetic products and toiletries that may have come in contact with flood water. When in doubt, throw it out.

How can I protect myself while cleaning up my home?

Before entering your home after a flooding event, you should:

- Turn off the gas and electricity.
- Check for gas leaks and loose power lines.
- Check for obvious structural damage.
- Turn off valves for fuel oil or propane.

Everyone participating in the cleanup process should wear gloves and protective clothing, including safety glasses and rubber boots. Wash your hands with soap and safe water before preparing or eating food, after toilet use and after handling items contaminated with flood water.

What should I do about sewage in my home?

Flood waters may contain fecal material from overflowing sewage systems. This material contains disease-causing organisms, but may not pose a serious health risk unless it enters the body. Open cuts and sores also may present a risk of disease if exposed to flood water. Keep them as clean as possible by washing them with soap to control infection.

Check sewer lines for obstructions and repair any leaks. Remove and discard all contaminated, porous materials such as carpet, cushions, drywall and trim around the base of walls. After removal, clean all contaminated areas thoroughly with soap and water and disinfect with a solution of one cup of bleach to five gallons of water. Dry affected areas thoroughly with fans before making repairs. Wash your hands frequently during and after working in a contaminated area.

What should I do to protect against mold?

Mold is associated with wet surfaces. When you have moisture in your house, mold can start to develop in a few days. Children and the elderly are very sensitive to mold. It can cause coughing, a stuffy or runny nose and eye irritation. Mold also can worsen or cause asthma. To stop mold from growing in your home, identify and dry out all materials that are wet, remove materials that are contaminated with mold and clean semiporous and nonporous materials. To protect yourself while cleaning, wear removeable outer clothing, eye goggles, a filter mask and gloves.

Can lead-based paint be a problem?

Lead can be present in plumbing fixtures and paint. Any home built before 1978 is likely to have lead-based paint. In the event of a flood, you may be exposed to lead from different sources including deteriorating paint, contaminated soil and dust from paint. Exposure to lead can cause high blood pressure, nerve disorders, sleep trouble, muscle pain, joint pain and mood change. In children, the consequences of lead exposure can be severe such as brain damage, hearing impairment, growth reduction, kidney damage, learning impairment and behavioral problems. Children from six months to six years of age are most affected by lead. Have your child's blood lead level checked once a year by your doctor or local health center.

What can I do about extra garbage?

Excess garbage caused by a flooding event can cause serious health effects. The waste can attract a variety of insects and rodents. To prevent this, bag and dispose of waste products from your home and yard as soon as possible. Call your local sanitation department to request a pickup.

What can I do about mosquitoes?

Mosquitoes breed in standing water. To eliminate them, remove standing water around the home. Technicians from the DeKalb County Board of Health are available upon request to assess your property. When needed, they can apply larvicide to prevent mosquitoes from developing in standing water that cannot be removed.

To protect yourself from mosquitoes, apply insect repellent to exposed skin and clothing. The most effective repellents contain DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide), picaridin and oil of lemon eucalyptus. When using repellent, always follow the manufacturer's instructions

What can I do about rodents

To eliminate rodents, remove their food and water sources and habitat. Technicians from the DeKalb County Board of Health are available upon request to inspect your property and apply rat bait or rodenticide.

What are possible health symptoms after a flood?

Some common symptoms are diarrhea, nausea and vomiting, abdominal cramps, headache, stress and trouble sleeping. If these symptoms appear, you should contact your doctor or local health center.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

American Red Cross (www.redcross.org) 404-296-0505
DeKalb County Board of Health, Division of Environmental Health (www.dekalbhealth.net) 404-508-7900
DeKalb County Department of Public Works, Sanitation (www.dekalb.ga.us) 770-936-5433
DeKalb County Department of Public Works, Water and Sewer (www.dekalb.ga.us) 770-621-7200
Georgia Emergency Management Agency (www.gema.state.ga.us) 404-635-7000