

Recovering from flooding – health and safety advice

Flooding from severe rain and storm activity or cyclones is the most common disaster scenario in Australia. Following the initial damage to property and infrastructure, flood water that has receded can still cause death, sickness and injury.

There is an increased risk of wound infections, dermatitis, conjunctivitis, and ear, nose and throat infections from polluted waters. Leptospirosis, melioidosis and diarrhoeal disease can also be contracted from flood waters. Deaths from rare diseases, such as melioidosis, have occurred from previous floods in Queensland.

Increased mosquito breeding can increase the risk of mosquito borne diseases. Drowning can occur in fast flowing water as well as in unseen washouts or holes.

Action to take

Keeping healthy after flooding

- Always wear covered shoes, indoors and out, while cleaning up. Cuts from broken glass and debris are always a problem after floods.
- Be aware that muddy surfaces can be extremely slippery resulting in falls that can cause fractures and other injuries. Good shoes can help, but also consider using a walking pole or similar, such as a piece of smooth timber (eg. broom handle or a piece of tree branch).
- Protect your skin from cuts and abrasions which could become infected by contact with flood water and mud and don't play or wade in flood water.
- Clean and disinfect all wounds and keep them covered with waterproof dressings as far as possible.
- If you receive a tetanus prone wound (eg. open fractures, deep penetrating wounds, bites, splinters and wounds contaminated with soil, dust or manure), check you are up to date with immunisations. If not fully vaccinated or you have not had a tetanus booster dose in the previous five years, seek medical attention.
- Sandflies and mosquitoes may become a real nuisance. Cover your skin with long sleeves and long pants and apply insect repellent to exposed skin following the directions on the label. Empty any containers and other items (eg. tyres, palm fronds) holding water around your home.
- Wear sunscreen, a hat and sunglasses while working outdoors.
- Watch out for snakes and spiders that may have hidden inside houses as the flood water rose.
- Wash hands with soap and water after touching flood water and mud, going to the toilet and before eating or making food.

Drinking water

- Don't drink flood water or tank water which may have been contaminated by flood water. Your council will alert you if the local water supply is contaminated.

- Check rain water tanks, particularly inground tanks. If they have been inundated with flood water, the water may be contaminated and should be discarded.
- Disinfect the tank using enough chlorine to give an initial chlorine dose of 5mg/L. The amounts required will depend on the amount of available chlorine in the product you use. Read the labels. However, as a general rule:
 - household bleach (4% concentration) - 125 ml or 125g / 1000 litres
 - liquid swimming pool chlorine (12.5%) - 40 ml or 40g / 1000 litres
 - granular swimming pool chlorine (70%) - 7ml or 7g / 1000 litres
 After adding, allow to stand for at least one hour. You will need to calculate the amount of water in your tank to determine the appropriate amount of chlorine to put in.

Food safety

- Discard any food that has been in the water, except if it is in an undamaged water proof container (tin or bottle). Wash tins or bottles using one cup of household bleach to a bucket of water. Re-label containers with a marker if the labels come off.
- If your power was off for more than 36 hours, and the freezer was not kept stocked with ice, food will start to spoil and should be eaten immediately. What can't be eaten should be thrown out.
- Throw out any food that has started to spoil, especially if it smells bad, tastes strange or is slimy. **If in doubt, throw it out!**
- You can refreeze partially defrosted food, but be aware the shelf-life and quality will be reduced.
- Until your power and refrigeration is restored, buy only limited stocks of perishable foods that can be consumed immediately.

Cleaning in and around homes and buildings

- If there has been a backflow of sewage into the house, wear waterproof gloves and rubber boots during the clean-up.
- Clean walls and floors with soap and water.
- Clean food contact surfaces (benches and fridges) with soap and water, then disinfect using a solution consisting of one cup of bleach to a bucket of clean water.
- Wash linen, towels and clothing in hot water and disinfectant and dry thoroughly.
- Items that cannot be washed and disinfected should be discarded. Remove and discard absorbent household materials such as mattresses, upholstered furniture, curtains, wall coverings, rugs and plasterboard.
- Take all necessary precautions if handling asbestos cement debris. Contact your local council or emergency workers for information on any special requirements or arrangements relating to waste collection and disposal in your local area.

If you believe a homeowner, occupant or owner-builder is unsafely handling, removing or transporting asbestos material or a person has illegally dumped asbestos waste, please contact your local council.

If you believe a business or contractor is unsafely handling, removing or transporting asbestos materials, phone the Queensland Department of Justice and the Attorney-General (Workplace Health and Safety Queensland) on 1300 369 915.

For more information

- This fact sheet can be accessed online at www.health.qld.gov.au/healthieryou/disaster along with other fact sheets including:
 - *Prepare a family disaster plan*
 - *Prepare a family flood emergency plan*
 - *Prepare an emergency kit*
- Is it safe? Cracked, damaged or weathered asbestos cement sheeting www.health.qld.gov.au/asbestos/documents/damaged_sheeting_fs.pdf
- Asbestos in the home www.health.qld.gov.au/asbestos
- Department of Infrastructure and Planning local government contact details www.dip.qld.gov.au/local-government-directory/index.php
- Emergency Management Queensland www.emergency.qld.gov.au/emq/css/beprepared.asp
- Emergency Management Australia community awareness publications www.ema.gov.au/www/emaweb/emaweb.nsf/Page/Publications

For further information, contact your nearest Queensland Health public health unit:

Brisbane North	Tel: 3624 1111	Gold Coast	Tel: 5568 3700	Rockhampton	Tel: 4920 6989
Brisbane South	Tel: 3000 9148	Hervey Bay	Tel: 4184 1800	Sunshine Coast	Tel: 5409 6600
Bundaberg	Tel: 4150 2780	Logan	Tel: 3412 2989	Toowoomba	Tel: 4631 9888
Central West	Tel: 4920 6989	Mackay	Tel: 4885 6611	Townsville	Tel: 4753 9000
Cairns	Tel: 4226 5555	Moreton Bay	Tel: 3142 1800	West Moreton	Tel: 3413 1200
Charleville	Tel: 4656 8100	Mount Isa	Tel: 4744 9100		