



General Health Precautions for People Living in Flooded Areas

Flooding can lead to many potential health hazards. Residents of flooded areas can protect their health by following the recommendations below.

Personal Safety and Health

- After handling contaminated materials, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and uncontaminated water before touching yourself or anyone else, particularly on the face, mouth, eyes or nose.
- Do not touch or handle food and eating or cooking utensils until you have washed your hands thoroughly.
- Immediately see your health care provider if you have sudden onset of diarrhea, vomiting, fever, or if you observe sudden signs of an infected wound.
- Children should not be allowed to play in floodwater because of its disease transmission potential as well as for safety reasons. Some diseases associated with flood waters include diarrheal illness, skin infections and infectious hepatitis.
- Adults should avoid standing in or walking through flood waters if at all possible unless they work with rescue and recovery. Wearing protective boots, clothing and gloves would add to safety.
- If exposed to floodwaters, wash your body and clothing as soon as possible after exposure.

Flooded and Refrigerated Food: If in doubt, throw it out!

- Your refrigerator will keep foods cool for about four hours without power if it is unopened.
- Do not eat any food that may have come in contact with flood water.
- Discard any food that has been at room temperature for over two hours and any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture.

- Discard any food without a waterproof container if there is any chance it has come into contact with flood water.
- Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if you remove the can labels, thoroughly wash the cans, and then disinfect them with a solution consisting of 1 cup of bleach to 5 gallons of water.
- Re-label your cans, including expiration date and maker.
- Home-canned foods and food containers with screw caps, snap lids, crimped caps (soda pop bottles), twist caps and flip tops should be discarded if they have come into contact with flood water because they cannot be disinfected.
- For infants, use only canned baby formula that requires no added water. Disinfect the bottles and nipples or use disposable bottle inserts.

If your refrigerator or freezer stop:

If you have a full home freezer, you have made a major financial investment for food. If you grew the food and prepared it for freezing, you also have many hours of time invested. Considering these investments, it is important to take a few precautions to ensure against loss in case of a power or mechanical failure or other problem that may cause the freezer to stop or malfunction.

For information about what you can do if your freezer (or refrigerator) stops working during a power failure, see CSU Extension's fact sheet # 9.357 available at www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/foodnut/09357.html

Drinking Water Supply

Public:

Your community drinking water supply has many safeguards to protect water quality. However, this protection may be compromised during floods and other emergencies. Public water system officials will notify you of possible problems and instruct you how to ensure safety of the drinking water.

Watch your local newspaper, and websites (Warnings and links will be posted at www.larimer.org).

For best assurance of keeping up-to-date, sign up for emergency alerts to go to your landline, cellphone or e-mail through the [Larimer Emergency Telephone Authority \(LETA\)](#).

If you have safety concerns, contact your public water system or the health department to determine if any precautions are necessary:

- Larimer County Department of Health and Environment: 498-6775
<http://www.larimer.org/health/ehs/water.asp>

- Fort Collins Utilities: 221-6700, utilities@fcgov.com
- City of Loveland, Water Division: 962-3000 <http://www.ci.loveland.co.us/wp/water/>
- Town of Estes Park: 586-5331, <http://www.estesnet.com/lightpower/waterdefault.aspx>

Private:

Floodwaters can transport diseasecarrying materials from barnyards, feedlots or sewage disposal systems into drinking water wells. Water from a well that may have been flooded should not be used for drinking until the well has been tested and found

to be safe by state or local health officials. Until then:

- Use bottled water for drinking and cooking until your water supply is proven to be safe.
- For information on water testing, call the health department at 498-6775 or on-line at <http://larimer.org/health/ehs/drinking.asp>
- In addition to bacteria, a well may become contaminated with certain chemicals during flooding. Of special concern is **nitrate** which, if carried into drinking water, can cause a serious condition in infants.
- Serious poisonings, sometimes fatal, have occurred in infants younger than 6 months old after drinking water containing nitrate (as nitrogen) at concentrations greater than 10 milligrams per liter.

Sewage back-ups

If your septic system has backed up due to flooding:

- Always wear rubber gloves, and protective clothing when in contact with the sewage
- Wash your hands and any body part exposed to the sewage with soap and uncontaminated water after exposure
- Do not try to fix it yourself.
- Do not allow children or pregnant women to come in contact with the sewage.
- Do not attempt to add wastewater to an already flooded septic system. Wastewater can be collected in a portable toilet container and retained for future disposal into a working septic system or public sewer access.
- Once the floodwaters have receded, call the health department at 498-6775 for instructions on how to disinfect your home.

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