



STATE HYGIENIC LABORATORY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA



Flood Health and Safety

Common Illnesses from Exposure to Flood Water

- Skin and tissue infections following superficial cuts, scratches, abrasions, or insect bites
- Deep tissue infections following puncture wounds or trauma
- Gastrointestinal illnesses following ingestion of contaminated water or food

Prevention of Flood-related Illnesses — Remember Basic Hygiene Practices

- Always wash hands with soap and water before eating food and after handling articles contaminated with flood water.
- Avoid prolonged exposure to flood water.
- Wear protective gloves, boots and eye wear.
- Work cautiously, rest frequently and eat a balanced diet.
- Bathe or shower in clean water as soon as possible after exposure to flood water.
- Use insect repellents to discourage biting insects.

Safe Drinking Water Options

- Obtain water from a known safe public water supply or buy bottled water.
- Haul and store drinking water in clean containers (not old milk or juice jugs).
- Clear water may be treated for drinking by boiling it for one minute or by adding two to three drops of unscented household bleach per gallon.

Private Well Recommendations

- Don't drink water from flooded wells unless it has been properly disinfected and then tested for drinking safety.
- Contact your local county health department for a free flood sampling container and advice.
- **AFTER** flood waters have receded, shock chlorinate and flush wells **BEFORE** submitting a sample to the Laboratory for testing.
- Shallow wells (less than 100 feet deep) can be contaminated from nearby flooding and should be tested to ensure a safe supply of drinking water.

Food Safety Recommendations

- Discard all containers with signs of leakage or damage.
- Foods in paper, cardboard or flexible plastic must be thrown away.
- Discard foods in corked bottles, canisters and screw-capped jars or bottles.
- Canned goods may be sanitized and used if the label is removed, the can is washed in hot, soapy water and the item is identified with a permanent marking pen.
- Solutions containing chlorine bleach are not recommended for cleaning cans because they accelerate rusting.
- Leafy vegetables cannot be washed adequately to be eaten raw.
- Thawed foods should not be refrozen.

General Clean-Up After a Flood

- Use non-sudsing cleaning products (Spic and Span®, Trisodium Phosphate, etc.) to wash interior surfaces.
- Use commercial cleaners for fabrics.
- Disinfect sewage-contaminated areas with a solution of household bleach (1/4 cup per gallon of water).
- Consult professional carpet cleaners before attempting to salvage carpet or carpet pads.
- Remove flood damaged sheet rock to permit studs and insulation to dry thoroughly.
- Remove silt, sludge, and debris from ductwork and dry it thoroughly before reactivating heating/air conditioning units.

State Hygienic Laboratory Services to Flood Families

- Private well water testing for individuals through county health departments
- Consultation on disease prevention, water and food safety and disinfection of environmental surfaces

Sources of Additional Information and Assistance

- ISU Extension Service
- Iowa Department of Public Health
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- County Health Departments
- American Red Cross
- Iowa Department of Natural Resources