



## Polk County Health Department

# FLOOD Fact Sheet

Flooding can pose many health risks, making it important to follow proper precautions when cleaning up after a flood.

### Floodwater Hazards

Floodwater can result in sickness caused by *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, Hepatitis A, typhoid, and tetanus. The symptoms are similar and include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, muscle aches, and fever. Most cases of sickness associated with flooding are brought about by ingesting contaminated food or water, however, tetanus can be acquired from contaminated soil or water entering broken skin.

Floodwaters also may be contaminated by agricultural or industrial chemicals. The symptoms most frequently associated with these exposures include headaches, skin rashes, dizziness, nausea, excitability, weakness, and fatigue.

Pools of standing water attract mosquitoes, increasing the risk of encephalitis and West Nile Virus.

Flooding contributes to the growth of many kinds of fungi, some of which can cause sickness, when it is inhaled. It can cause allergic or flu-like symptoms, as well as fungal skin infections.

### Cleaning Up After a Flood

Cleaning up after a flood can require demolition of buildings, generating airborne asbestos, a mineral fiber that can cause chronic lung disease or cancer. If a structure was built before 1978 it probably has lead based paint, which can cause lead poisoning in children.

- Avoid breathing dust from wet building materials and crops.
- Surfaces that have a light covering of mold should be scrubbed with warm, soapy water and rinsed with a disinfectant made of ½ cup bleach in one gallon of water.
- Consider using an N-95 NIOSH-approved disposable respirator.
- Remove all wet materials and discard or disinfect with bleach solution.

- Take frequent rest breaks when working, use teams of two to lift heavy objects, have clean drinking water available, and practice good lifting techniques.

- If tearing down building structures, call OSHA at 515-284-4794 to meet standards for asbestos and lead based paint clean up.

- If flooding is imminent, unplug as many appliances as you can. Do not touch or unplug an electrical appliance if the floor is damp. If you think the water might rise high enough to cover electrical outlets, switch off the circuit breakers at the main electrical box. Be sure water is not covering outlets before entering the basement. Call MidAmerican Energy, 888-427-5632, with questions about flooding and electricity and natural gas services.

### How to Protect Yourself

- Do not walk in flooded areas and do not let children or pets play in flood water.

- Assume that any water in flooded areas is not safe unless the local or state authorities have declared it to be safe.

- If no safe water is available, use bottled water, water that has been boiled for at least 10 minutes, or chemically disinfected water (use 5 drops of liquid household bleach to each gallon of water, let sit for 30 minutes). Rinse water containers periodically with bleach.

- Do not use contaminated water to wash and prepare food, brush your teeth, wash dishes, or make ice.

- If the safety of a food or beverage is questionable, throw it out.

- Be sure your tetanus shot is current (within the last 10 years, or the last 5 years if you have a deep cut).

- Wash your hands with soap and clean water often.

- Wear long pants and sleeves and use insect repellent to avoid mosquito bites.

- Call the authorities when dealing with chemical, electric, and structural hazards.