# Floodwater and Health

## What are the health concerns with floodwater?

Floodwater can pose many health risks to people. Floodwater can contain chemicals, debris, sewage, and infectious organisms, including intestinal bacteria such as *E. coli*, Salmonella, Shigella, hepatitis A virus, and the agents for typhoid and tetanus. Floodwater can cause illness, electricity from power lines or other sources may be active through standing water and can cause electrocution, biting snakes and insects may be present in the water, and floodwater can flow into wells making the water unsafe to drink.

## What should people know about drinking water contamination?

Drinking contaminated water may cause illness. If you have a well (not city water) and the wellhead has been covered by floodwater, the well water should be considered contaminated and unsafe to drink. The water should be boiled; bring water to a rolling boil for one minute, then cool before drinking, washing, or using it for cooking. If you cannot boil water, it can be disinfected by adding eight drops (one-eighth teaspoon) of unscented household bleach per gallon of water. Let the water stand for 30 minutes; if it is still cloudy after 30 minutes, repeat the procedure. Use only bottled water when possible, especially for mixing baby formula. If you have city water and the public water system lost pressure, a boil water notice will be issued for your area.

## What should people know about floodwater and food?

Do not eat any food that has come into contact with floodwater. Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers if they have come into contact with floodwaters because there is no way to safely clean them. Thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes, and metal utensils with soap and hot water and sanitize by boiling them in clean water or by immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of one quarter cup of unscented household bleach per gallon of water.

## What other health concerns are associated with floodwater?

Floodwater can and frequently does contain sewage, which can contain bacteria that can cause illness. Always wash any skin that has come into contact with floodwater thoroughly as soon as possible with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected. Avoid letting cuts, abrasions, or wounds come into contact with floodwater because this may cause infection. You should wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected and cooled:

- After using the bathroom
- After changing diapers
- After touching floodwater or anything that has come into contact with floodwater
- Before eating or preparing food
- After handling uncooked food
- After playing with a pet
- After handling garbage

- After helping someone who is sick or injured
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After participating in floodwater cleanup

**For specific concerns about floodwater and drinking water or wells, contact the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services at 603-271-3503 or visit their website at www.des.state.nh.us. For specific concerns about floodwater and food, contact the NH Department of Health and Human Services, Food Protection Section at 603-271-4589 or visit the DHHS website at www.dhhs.nh.gov. For specific concerns about health and flood water, contact the NH DHHS' Communicable Disease Control Section at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345 x4496 or visit the DHHS website at www.dhhs.nh.gov. For further information, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods or the (FEMA) Federal Emergency Management Agency website at www.fema.gov/hazard/flood/index.shtm.**