Precipitation

And Flooding

Department of Health

Preparing for Precipitation and Flooding

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) is encouraging awareness of health effects caused by instances of increased heavy precipitation and flooding. "Heavy precipitation" refers to instances during which the amount of rain or snow experienced in a location substantially exceeds what is normal. In recent years, a larger percentage of precipitation has come in the form of intense single-day events. Flooding is the most frequently occurring natural disaster in Ohio and the United States.

Flooding of a sewage system can be a hazardous situation for homeowners and businesses. It may result in backed-up sewage, contaminated drinking water, and lack of sanitation until the problem is fixed.

Stay Out of Floodwater

Floodwater can contain hidden dangers to your health. It is unknown exactly what is in floodwater at any given point in time. Floodwater can contain:

- Downed power lines.
- Human and livestock waste.
- Household, medical, and industrial hazardous waste (chemical, biological, and radiological).
- Coal ash waste that can contain carcinogenic compounds such as arsenic, chromium, and mercury.
- Other germs and contaminants that can lead to illness.
- Physical objects such as lumber, vehicles, and debris.
- Wild or stray animals such as rodents and snakes.

Safety Tips to Use After a Flood

- Follow all evacuation alerts.
- Boil any water for drinking and food preparation.
- Clean and dry the areas of your home that have come in contact with floodwater.
- Clean and disinfect everything that got wet. Mud left from floodwater can contain sewage and chemicals.
- Protect against mosquitoes by removing standing water, using insect repellant, and wearing long sleeves.
- Avoid walking or driving through standing water and flooded areas.
- Always follow warnings about flooded roads.
- Don't drive in flooded areas—cars or other vehicles won't protect you from floodwaters. Vehicles can be swept away or may stall in moving water.

Health Challenges Associated with Flooding

Exposure to contaminated floodwater can cause:

- Wound infections.
- Skin infections.
- Gastrointestinal illness.
  - Examples: Cholera, Giardia, E. coli, Salmonella.
- Tetanus.

Health issues:

- Skin rashes.
- Mosquito-borne illnesses after being bitten by disease carrying mosquitoes hatched from eggs in or near standing water.
- Hepatitis.
- Legionnaire's disease.

It is important to protect yourself from exposure to floodwater regardless of the source of contamination. The best way to protect yourself is to stay out of the water.

If you come in contact with floodwater:

- Wash the area with soap and clean water as soon as possible. If you don't have soap or water, use alcohol-based wipes or sanitizer.
- Take care of wounds and seek medical attention, if necessary.
- Wash clothes contaminated with flood or sewage water in hot water and detergent before reusing them.

If you must enter floodwater, wear rubber boots, rubber gloves, and goggles.

How can I find out if I am in danger from a flood?

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards is one of the best ways to receive warnings from the National Weather Service (NWS). NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards is a nationwide network of radio stations broadcasting continuous weather and river information direct from nearby NWS offices. Also, the NWS web site provides forecasts and warnings, and identifies where flooding is occurring.

Tips to Stay Safe

Before a Flood:

- Know your risks based on Ohio Department of Natural Resources Floodplain Mapping.
- Protect property by moving valuables to higher levels.
- Consider purchasing flood insurance.

During a Flood Watch:

- Listen to all National Weather Service alerts and monitor conditions.
- Stay away from flood-prone areas such as stream beds, drainage ditches, and culverts.

During a Flood Warning/Emergency:

- Stay informed.
- Get to higher ground.
- Obey evacuation orders.
- Practice electrical safety.
- Do not attempt to walk or drive through moving water.
- If your vehicle stalls, abandon it immediately and seek higher ground.

Clean up after a flood:

- Resources for Flood Cleanup and Indoor Air Quality at: https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/resources-flood-cleanup-and-indoor-air-quality

Below are a list of additional helpful information and guidelines

- Floods at: https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/index.html
- Flood Maps and Studies at: https://ohiodnr.gov/business-and-industry/municipalities-and-public-entities/floodplains/floodplain-mapping
- Prevent Illness After a Disaster at: https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/disease/facts.html#sewage
- Emergency Flood Cleanup and Mold at: https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/healthy-homes/emergency-flood-cleanup-and-mold/emergency-flood-cleanup-and-mold
- Mold: Problems and Solutions at: https://www.fema.gov/fact-sheet/mold-problems-and-solutions
- Flood Cleanup to Protect Indoor Air and Your Health at: https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/flood-cleanup-protect-indoor-air-and-your-health
- Food and Water Safety During Power Outages and Floods at: https://www.fda.gov/food/buy-store-serve-safe-food/food-and-water-safety-during-power-outages-and-floods
- Safe Drug Use After a Natural Disaster at: https://www.fda.gov/drugs/emergency-preparedness-drugs/safe-drug-use-after-natural-disaster
- Disinfection Fact Sheet for Flooded Drinking Water Wells Simple Procedures for Homeowners at: https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/private-water-systems-program/media/flood-disinfection
- Carbon Monoxide Poisoning at: https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/healthy-homes/carbon-monoxide-poisoning

Contact Us

Email the ODH Bureau of Environmental Health and Radiation Protection (BEHRP) for environmental issues at: beh@odh.ohio.gov

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