

Feb. 28, 2011

Health & Safety Concerns - Floods

Mansfield, OH — Flooding affects hundreds of thousands of Americans every year. The Mansfield/Ontario/Richland County Health Department and the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) offers these tips to help Ohioans protect themselves and their children from potential hazards during and after a flood.

- Drowning is the No. 1 cause of flood deaths. No one should enter swiftly flowing water, regardless of their ability to swim.
- Don't rely on vehicles to protect you from flooding; people are more likely to drown inside a vehicle. Even shallow, standing water can be hazardous. Standing water may be covering glass, metal fragments or other dangerous objects.
- Don't let children drink or put toys in flood waters.
- Don't allow your children to play or swim in flood waters. If your child shows any signs or symptoms of illness after being in flood waters such as nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, contact your physician as soon as possible.
- If a person receives a cut, burn or puncture wound, make sure it does not come in contact with flood waters. Flood water may contain various bacteria, viruses and other infectious organisms that may cause disease. Flood water may also contain fecal material from overflowing sewage systems. If you are concerned about an injury, check with your physician to see if a **tetanus booster** is necessary.

Food Safety

Food that comes in contact with flood water can also pose a serious health risk. ODH recommends throwing away any product if there is any doubt about its safety. Simple ways to dry and clean your house:

- If the humidity outside is lower than indoors, and weather permitting, open all doors and windows.
- Use fans to move the air and dry your home. Do not use central air conditioning or furnace blower if the ducts were under water. They will blow dirty air that might contain contaminants.
- Use dehumidifiers and window air conditioners, especially in closed-up areas.
- Open closets and cabinet doors to let air circulate.
- Call a contractor who specializes in drying flooded buildings.

ODH also recommends throwing away home-canned goods if the tops have been exposed to flooding. Food in paper containers, cloth or cardboard packaging that has been exposed to flood water should also be discarded, along with soft drinks and condiments using capped containers.

Store-bought canned goods may be saved if they are disinfected prior to opening. Label the can with a waterproof marker, remove the paper label and wash the can thoroughly in hot, soapy water. Rinse well; after washing and rinsing, disinfect can by soaking it for five minutes in a chlorine solution using one tablespoon of bleach (labeled 5.25 percent sodium hypochlorite) for each gallon of cool water.

Water Safety

If you have a private well, run cold water for about 30 minutes to allow the well to recharge naturally. Do not save the water. Have the well disinfected and tested before drinking or using for cooking. If you must use tap water, boil it vigorously for at least one minute. If you cannot boil it, add 16 drops of bleach to each gallon of water. Mix thoroughly and allow to stand for 30 minutes. This method should be used only with water that is clean in appearance and free of odors.

Cleanup

Mold is a likely problem in flooded homes. Mold has the potential to affect the health of all family members. It is important to remove all water and fix any leaks before cleaning. Clean hard surfaces with a solution of bleach and water; make sure to ventilate the area when using chlorine bleach. Wear a filter mask and gloves to avoid contact with the mold. Let the bleach and water sit for 15 minutes and then dry the area thoroughly. Wet, porous materials, such as carpeting, wallboard, insulation, wallpaper and overstuffed furniture should be discarded because they remain a source of mold growth.

For more information on cleanup after a flood, go online to: www.richlandhealth.org and follow the links. Another website with information is www.weathersafety.ohio.gov

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