



Standing or Flood Water Health Risks

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After a flooding emergency, finding clean running water can be difficult. Flood waters may contain potentially dangerous materials, such as fecal material from overflowing sewage systems, agricultural runoff and chemicals from industrial areas. Wading in flood waters can also be a cause of infection or result in a variety of injuries.

Infectious diseases

Diarrheal illnesses

There is a risk of spreading disease by eating or drinking anything contaminated by flood water. Practice good hygiene after contact with flood waters. Do not allow children to play in flood water areas, wash children's hands frequently (always before meals) and do not allow children to play with flood-water contaminated toys that have not been disinfected.

Wound infections

Contact of intact skin with flood water does not, by itself, usually pose a serious health risk. However, wading in contaminated flood waters with open wounds can result in serious wound infections. If possible, do not wade in flood waters if you have an open wound. If you have any open wounds, keep them as clean as possible by washing well with soap and clean water to control infection. If you cannot avoid exposing open wounds to flood water, try and cover with a waterproof bandage before entering the water. If a wound develops redness, swelling, or drainage, seek immediate medical attention.

Chemical hazards

After a flood, use extreme caution when returning to your area. Be aware of potential chemical hazards during flood recovery. Flood waters may have buried or moved hazardous chemical containers of solvents or other industrial chemicals from their normal storage places.

Injuries

Drowning

If you enter fast-moving water, you risk drowning – regardless of your ability to swim. Fast-moving, shallow water can be deadly. Even shallow standing water can be dangerous for small children. Cars or other vehicles do not provide adequate protection from flood waters. Cars can be swept away or may break down in moving water.

Insect bites

Wading in flood waters can bring you into contact with a variety of animals, insects and reptiles (especially snakes). Before stepping into debris, poke with a stick to dislodge critters.

Electrical hazards

Avoid downed power lines, especially those in water.

Wounds

Avoid wading in standing water, which may contain sharp objects such as glass or metal fragments that can cause injury and possibly lead to infection.

(Source: CDC)