



Stay Healthy After the Flood



Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

Think Personal Hygiene!

Many disease-causing organisms are carried by flood water from failed sewage systems and animal waste sites into flooded homes and property. Some common illnesses caused by sewage-contaminated water are tetanus, hepatitis, dysentery, and food poisoning. Along with these viruses and bacteria, other disease causing organisms are found in floodwater.

Disease causing organisms can enter the body through openings. These openings can be the natural body openings like the mouth or through cuts, scratches, or wounds. The most common route is hand to mouth. People cleaning up or working in flood waters can accidentally expose themselves to the microorganisms by rubbing their eyes with a contaminate hand.

People working in floodwater and in cleanup areas should wear barrier clothing: rubber boots, rubber gloves and protective outer wear.

Be careful when eating and drinking while working in the flood area. Hands contaminated by the flood water may carry disease to food and drink. Those who work at flood or cleanup sites should hold sandwiches and drink by the container they come in and not touch food directly.

Treat Injuries Right Away

People with breaks in skin should carefully avoid contact with floodwater. Wash cuts and scratches immediately with warm soapy water. A solution of 2 percent tincture of iodine or a 3

percent hydrogen peroxide solution may be applied to disinfect the wound.

Clean equipment as soon as possible after use, preferably at the site. Equipment and clothing contaminated with floodwater should not be worn at home or in personal vehicles. Diseases from the floodwater or debris may be spread to the car, home or office.

Water Supply

Do not use water sources until you have checked with authorities. Private wells should be inspected to make sure they have not been contaminated. If the water appears cloudy, has an unusual smell, or taste unusual, use an alternate water supply. If you can tell that the flood water was at a level higher than your casing, use an alternate water supply. If you cannot get bottled water or carry water from a safe supply, boil your water before using it. A 10-minute boil will kill organisms but will not remove other contaminants such as heavy metals, salts, and most other chemicals.

Immunizations

Protection from disease is one of the goals of any clean up operation. Those who work around flood water or the aftermath of the flood should have their 10 year booster shot. Some authorities recommend that a five year booster is needed if you will be working in floodwater or flood cleanup.

Michael H. Bradshaw,
Extension Specialist, Health and Safety

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

MF-1138

August 1993

It is the policy of Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service that all persons shall have equal opportunity and access to its educational programs, services, activities, and materials without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age or disability. Kansas State University is an equal opportunity organization. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating, Marc A. Johnson, Director.