



NEWS

R E L E A S E

Illinois Department of Public Health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 27, 2010

CONTACT: Melaney Arnold
Communications Manager
(217) 558-0500
www.idph.state.il.us

Health and Safety Recommendations for Flooding

Food and water safety and clean-up

SPRINGFIELD – Illinois Department of Public Health Director Dr. Damon T. Arnold is urging residents in and around flooded areas to take precautions to help prevent disease and stay safe and healthy.

Floodwaters can contain bacteria, fecal material, viruses, and other organisms that may cause disease. The following information can help protect communities from illness and injury:

- Avoid skin contact with floodwater, especially cuts and sores. Keep them clean and covered.
- Do not allow children to play in floodwater.
- Do not eat or drink anything exposed to floodwater.
- Keep contaminated objects, water and hands away from mucous membranes (mouth, eyes and nose).
- Wash hands frequently, especially after bathroom use, before eating and immediately following contact with floodwater or contaminated objects or surfaces.

Food and Water Safety

Generally, do not eat any food that has come in contact with floodwater, including food in refrigerators or freezers. All fresh fruits and vegetables exposed to floodwater should be thrown out, especially those in home gardens. If the safety of any food or beverage is questionable, follow this simple rule: **When in doubt, throw it out.**

If the power has gone out, a fully stocked freezer will keep food frozen two days if the door remains closed. A half-full freezer can keep foods frozen about one day. Food in the refrigerator can normally stay cold for four to six hours. Discard milk, cheeses and other foods prone to spoilage. Completely thawed meats and vegetables should be discarded without question.

-more-

For canned goods:

- Throw out food in containers with cork-lined lids or caps, screw tops or pop tops that have been exposed to floodwater. They are nearly impossible to clean thoroughly around the opening.
- Undamaged cans are usually safe. Wash them in bleach water (1/4-cup bleach per one gallon of water) for one minute, and then dry to prevent rusting.
- If cans have dents or pitted rust spots that cannot be buffed off with a soft cloth, contamination may have entered through corroded holes so you should throw these out.
- Cans with ends that bulge or spring in and out when pressed should be thrown out. Do not taste the contents in the cans.

Public and private water supplies may be contaminated in a flood so listen for public announcements on the safety of your area's water supply. If your water is contaminated, use only bottled or disinfected water for drinking, cooking, tooth brushing and bathing until you are sure the water supply is safe. If you have to use tap water, boil it vigorously for at least five minutes. Private water wells should be pumped out, allowed to recharge naturally, disinfected and the water tested before drinking or being used for cooking.

Removal and cleanup of floodwater is essential. It is important to take the following precautions to prevent injury:

- Turn off main power switches. Air out and wipe dry all appliances and electrical outlets exposed to water before using.
- If you have fuel oil or gas systems, be sure tanks are secure and all lines are free from breaks.
- Wear rubber boots, gloves and a dust mask during removal and cleanup.
- Open windows to ventilate and dry the area. Fans can be used to help with drying.

The following cleaning guidelines may help prevent the transmission of disease and reduce property loss:

- Discard any contaminated objects that cannot be thoroughly washed or laundered.
- Wash contaminated surfaces and objects with warm, soapy water and then disinfect them with a bleach and water solution made of no more than one cup of bleach per one gallon of water. For objects that would be damaged by bleach, use a home or laundry disinfectant.
- Make sure to read and follow label instructions. Do not use ammonia. Ammonia vapors mixed with bleach vapors create a toxic gas that could be deadly.

For additional information, check out our *After the Flood* booklet at www.idph.state.il.us/pdf/AfterTheFlood.pdf.