

## **Water Safety, Food Safety and Avoiding Illness after a Flood**

Recorded Information Line – 07/01/06

Option 5

Safe water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene includes bottled, boiled, or treated water. Here are some general rules concerning water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene. Remember:

- Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula. If possible, use baby formula that does not need to have water added.
- You can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to wash your hands. If you use bottled water, be sure it came from a safe source. If you do not know that the water came from a safe source, you should boil or treat it before you use it. Use only bottled, boiled, or treated water until your supply is tested and found safe. Boiling water, when practical, is the preferred way to kill harmful bacteria and parasites. Bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute will kill most organisms. When boiling water is not practical, you can treat water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or unscented household chlorine bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite): If you use chlorine tablets or iodine tablets, follow the directions that come with the tablets.
- If you use household chlorine bleach, add 1/8 teaspoon (~0.75 mL) of bleach per gallon of water if the water is clear. For cloudy water, add 1/4 teaspoon (~1.50 mL) of bleach per gallon. Mix the solution thoroughly and let it stand for about 30 minutes before using it.

Note: Treating water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or liquid bleach will not kill parasitic organisms.

Use a bleach solution to rinse water containers before reusing them. Use water storage tanks and other types of containers with caution. For example, fire truck storage tanks and previously used cans or bottles may be contaminated with microbes or chemicals. Do not rely on untested devices for decontaminating water.

To make sure your food is safe do not eat any food that may have come into contact with floodwater. For infants, use only pre-prepared canned baby formula that requires no added water, rather than powdered formulas prepared with treated water. Thawed food can usually be eaten or refrozen if it is still "refrigerator cold," or if it still contains ice crystals. To be safe, remember, "When in doubt, throw it out." Discard any refrigerated or frozen food that has been at room temperature for two hours or more and any food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture.

To avoid illness it is critical for you to remember to practice basic hygiene during the emergency period. Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected:

- before preparing or eating food;
- after toilet use;
- after participating in flood cleanup activities; and
- after handling articles contaminated with floodwater or sewage.

Floodwaters may contain fecal material from overflowing sewage systems, and agricultural and industrial byproducts. Although skin contact with floodwater does not, by itself, pose a serious health risk, there is some risk of disease from eating or drinking anything contaminated with floodwater.

If you have any open cuts or sores that will be exposed to flood water, keep them as clean as possible by washing well with soap to control infection. If a wound develops redness, swelling, or drainage, seek immediate medical attention. If you receive a puncture wound or a wound contaminated with feces, soil, or saliva, contact your medical provider to determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary.

In addition, parents need to help children avoid waterborne illness. 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. You can disinfect toys using a solution of one cup of bleach in 5 gallons of water.

For emergency cooking you can use a fireplace, barbeque grill or camp stove. Do not use a grill with charcoal briquettes for cooking indoors. Doing so can cause carbon monoxide poisoning. Always use a charcoal grill outdoors. You can also heat food with candle warmers, chafing dishes and fondue pots. Canned food can be eaten right from the can. If you heat the can, be sure to open it and remove the label first.

For more information food safety, water safety and how to avoid illness after a flood visit the Centers for Disease Control website at [www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters).