



KANAWHA-CHARLESTON HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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MEDICAL AND HEALTH CARE PRECAUTIONS IMPORTANT DURING FLOOD RELIEF

The Kanawha-Charleston Health Department recommends that as clean-up efforts continue, special precautions should be taken for medical and health care needs.

As floods hit, our first priority is to ensure the safety of the people affected. We focus on controlling injuries, illness, and disease outbreaks. People often are concerned about the risk of tetanus after exposure to flood waters. Tetanus ("lockjaw") is contracted when tetanus bacteria get into an open wound. There is a vaccine to protect against tetanus; those needing the shot include anyone who hasn't completed the primary series of tetanus vaccinations (usually given during childhood), and anyone who hasn't had a tetanus booster in the last ten years. More severe or dirty wounds may require vaccine if it's been more than five years since the last booster. Please contact your health care provider or the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department for more information.

Injuries are one of the biggest potential problems during a flood. The first rule of thumb is to never walk or drive into moving water if you don't know how deep it is. As you're doing your cleaning, make sure you pace yourself and don't tire yourself out. Other ways to prevent injuries include wearing protective clothing such as heavy footwear, gloves and long sleeves. Before entering any building that has been flooded, check its foundation for cracks that could indicate shifting and make sure the surface you're about to stand on is stable. Don't take small children to flood clean-up sites -it's difficult to provide adequate supervision to prevent potentially serious or life-threatening injuries to youngsters under such circumstances.

When using cleaning supplies, never combine bleach and ammonia -this combination can create deadly toxic fumes -and always make sure the area where you're using heavy duty cleaning solutions is well ventilated to keep from being overcome by fumes. Also, make sure areas are well ventilated where you're using space heaters or kerosene stoves. These can cause build-up of deadly carbon monoxide and other odorless gases.

It's also important to make sure food and water supplies are safe for consumption. Eating or drinking contaminated products can cause illness, leading to symptoms such as nausea and vomiting or diarrhea. It's important if you do experience these symptoms to drink plenty of safe fluids to keep from getting dehydrated.

Perishable foods should be thrown out if they have been without refrigeration for two or more hours; and foods that have thawed or partially thawed should also be destroyed. Foods sealed in airtight tin cans can be salvaged, but the cans should be thoroughly disinfected before they are opened. That should be done by first removing the can label and washing the can with a detergent, then rinsing it in clean water. Then they can should be submerged in a disinfectant of two tablespoons of household bleach per one gallon of water, and rinsed again with clean water. Home-canned foods should probably be destroyed because their screw-on lids cannot properly protect the food from contamination.

For additional help and information on flood clean-up activities, call the Environmental Section at 304-348-8050. To obtain information on where you may get your tetanus vaccine, you may call our Health Clinic at 304-348-8080.

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