

Q&A: Protect your health after a flood

1. What basic steps should I take to protect my and my family's health after a flood?

- After touching anything that flood water has also touched, wash your hands and clothes with plenty of soap and clean running water.
- If no safe water supply is available, use bottled, boiled, or chemically disinfected water to wash hands, brush teeth, and for bathing.
- Wash children's hands with soap and water often and always before meals. Do not allow children to play in floodwater areas, or with toys that have been contaminated by floodwater and have not been disinfected.
- Do not eat any fruit or vegetables from gardens affected by flood water, even if the garden is now dry. Plants and the soil can be contaminated with germs and chemicals that can make you sick. Start over with clean dirt after the risk of floods have passed.



2. What health and disease risks should I know about after a flood?

Wounds

- Clean minor wounds thoroughly with soap and clean water, and keep them bandaged, covered, and dry.
- Use antibiotic cream to reduce the risk of infection.
- If a wound or sore develops redness, swelling, or pus/drainage, talk to a health care provider.
- If it has been more than 10 years since your last tetanus vaccine, you should get a booster—or start the vaccine series if you haven't yet. Flood clean-up and repairs increase the chance of injury and tetanus.
- If you get a deep or puncture wound, or if feces or soil get into an open wound, talk to your health care provider to see if you need a tetanus booster—even if it has been less than 10 years since your last booster.



Diarrheal disease

- Floodwater may contain sewage. Eating or drinking anything contaminated by floodwater can cause diarrheal disease.
- Symptoms of diarrheal disease include fever, headache, body aches, tiredness, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramping, and diarrhea. If you have any of these symptoms, get rest and **drink plenty of clean water**.
- Talk to a health care provider if you have any of these symptoms:
 - Diarrhea that lasts for more than 3 days
 - Diarrhea along with a fever higher than 102°F/38.9°C
 - Bloody diarrhea
 - So much vomiting that you cannot keep liquids down and you pass very little urine



3. What should I know about E. Coli and floodwater?

- E. Coli bacteria are often harmless, but some types can cause serious illness. If Public Health learns about an E. coli outbreak that can be dangerous to people, we will alert the community.

4. What vaccines should I get after a flood?

- You should get a booster dose of a tetanus vaccine if you have not had a booster dose within the last 10 years.
- There are no other special vaccination recommendations for people returning home after a flood.

5. I don't have a doctor right now, what should I do if I need help?

- Call the Community Health Access Program (CHAP) at 1-800-756-5437, or email chap@kingcounty.gov.

