

FLOOD WATER EXPOSURE



Massive flooding can result in waters contaminated with chemicals, bacteria, and sewage wastes making exposure to flood water dangerous and relief workers vulnerable to infectious diseases, chemical hazards, and injuries.

FLOOD WATERS MAY CONTAIN:¹

- Downed power lines
- Human and livestock waste
- Household, medical, and industrial hazardous waste (chemical, biological, and radiological)
- Coal ash waste that can contain carcinogenic compounds such as arsenic, chromium, and mercury
- Other germs and contaminants that can lead to illness
- Physical objects such as lumber, vehicles, and debris
- Wild or stray animals such as rodents and snakes

EXPOSURE TO CONTAMINATED FLOOD WATER CAN CAUSE:

- Wound infections
- Skin rash
- Gastrointestinal illness
- Tetanus
- Leptospirosis (not common)
- Melioidosis (along Gulf Coast)

RELIEF WORKER RECOMMENDATIONS:

Avoid contact and oral ingestion of the water as much as possible. For those in contact with contaminated waters, there are some precautions that should be taken:

- Make sure your vaccinations are up to date.
- When entering flood water, wear rubber boots, rubber gloves, and safety goggles.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water, especially before eating and drinking.
- Wash regularly with disinfectant soap or an alcohol-based cleaner.
- Have any open wounds or infections evaluated immediately.
- Do not smoke. Smoking increased the absorption of lead into the body, thus increasing the chance of illness.
- If you are unsure of your symptoms, seek advice from medical personnel.
- Flood water may contain sharp objects, such as glass or metal fragments, that can cause injury and lead to infection. Prompt first aid can help heal small wounds and prevent infection.

REFERENCE

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Safety Guidelines: Floodwater. <https://www.cdc.gov/floods/safety/floodwater-after-a-disaster-or-emergency-safety.html>. Accessed October 3, 2024.