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Queensland Health urges caution during storm and flood clean-up

Queenslanders have been urged to take the risk of injury and infection seriously while cleaning up after storms and floods.

Queensland Health Senior Director of Population Health Queensland Dr Linda Selvey said those involved in clean-up work faced significant risks.

“The number of injuries seen in hospital emergency departments after Cyclone Larry in 2006 increased dramatically – especially injuries involving chainsaws and falls from roofs.”

Injury, infection, food hygiene, water quality and mosquitoes rate among the post-storm concerns.

Dr Selvey said there was a real risk of injury for those involved in the clean-up.

“People using power tools, including chainsaws, should be particularly careful about their own safety, and also the safety of those around them.

“Anyone cleaning up after flood or storm damage should wear gloves and covered shoes, and treat any cuts with antiseptic.

“Floodwater, and the mud left from floodwater, can cause infections in the smallest of cuts, so even a scratch should be cleaned with antiseptic or salty water and covered with a clean waterproof dressing.

“If the skin around cuts becomes red or sore, see your doctor.”

Other tips for those involved in the clean-up include:

To reduce the risk of injury:

- wash your hands thoroughly before eating or smoking
- shower thoroughly with soap at the end of each day
- avoid unnecessary contact with mud and dirt
- wear protective clothing and keep children and pets away when operating chainsaws and other vegetation-clearing equipment
- even in cloudy conditions, protect yourself from the sun and ensure you drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration.
- clean and disinfect any household surfaces which have come into contact with floodwater
- don't try to do it too quickly, and get assistance if the job is too big
- look out for snakes and spiders which may have moved to drier ground

Dr Selvey warned food in freezers could start to spoil if power was off for extended periods. It should be eaten immediately or thrown out if there is evidence of thawing.

“Use common sense and do not take risks with either food or water,” Dr Selvey said.

“If in doubt – throw it out.”

Dr Selvey said anyone who was injured or became ill during the clean-up should call 000 in the case of an emergency or Queensland Health’s 24-hour 13 HEALTH (13 432584) line for general health advice.

For more information go to <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/floods/>

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