

Preventing harm from flood water

Most deaths from flooding in Australia result from people attempting to drive, walk or swim through flood waters.

Action to take

To minimise your risk of injury:

- do not walk through moving floodwater
- do not swim in floodwaters and ensure that you and your children keep away from stormwater drains and creeks
- do not drive into flooded areas. Ten centimetres of water will reach the bottom of most passenger cars and may cause loss of control and stalling. If floodwaters rise around your car, abandon the car and move to higher ground, if you can do so safely. Be aware of areas where floodwaters have receded - roads and bridges may have weakened and could collapse under the weight of a car
- be aware of the risk of electrocution by power lines that have fallen into floodwater.

Risk of disease

Floods may increase the risk of diseases such as leptospirosis, melioidosis, dengue fever and diarrhoeal diseases. However, the risk is generally low and outbreaks of disease following flooding are not common in Australia. There is an increased risk of wound infections, dermatitis, conjunctivitis, and ear, nose and throat infections if people come into direct contact with polluted waters. People with diabetes should take extra care to protect themselves against wound infections.

Avoid wading even in shallow water, as it may be contaminated - if you must enter shallow flood water, wear solid boots or shoes for protection.

Water quality

The major risk factor for outbreaks associated with flooding is the contamination of drinking water. Refer to the Queensland Health fact sheet *Ensuring safe drinking water*.

Check rainwater tanks, particularly inground tanks. If they have been inundated with flood waters, the water may have been contaminated and should be discarded. The water tank should be appropriately disinfected using enough chlorine to give an initial chlorine dose of 5mg/L. The amounts required will depend of the amount of available chlorine you use. Read the labels, however as a general rule:

- household bleach (4% concentration) - 125 ml or 125g / 1000 litres
- liquid swimming pool chlorine (12.5%) - 40 ml or 40g / 1000 litres
- granular swimming pool chlorine (70%) - 7ml or 7g / 1000 litres

After adding, allow to stand for at least one hour. You will need to calculate the amount of water in your tank to determine the appropriate amount of chlorine to put in.

Cleaning up after a flood

- If your house has been flooded, wear gloves and covered shoes when cleaning up, and treat any cuts immediately with antiseptic. Apply a protective dressing to the wound and see a doctor if injuries are serious.
- After cleaning silt and debris from floors and other surfaces, disinfect the surfaces with household bleach or disinfectant.
- Clean and disinfect refrigerators and food storage cupboards thoroughly.
- Be sure to thoroughly clean, using hot water and detergent, any cooking and eating utensils that may have come into contact with flood water. Do not eat food which has been in contact with flood water.
- Avoid unnecessary contact with mud and dirt, especially when you are cleaning up.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water before handling food, and after handling pets that may have swum in contaminated water.
- Wear insect repellent and other necessary personal protection against mosquitoes. Refer to the Queensland Health fact sheet *Controlling mosquito breeding after floods*.

For more information

- This fact sheet can be accessed online at www.health.qld.gov.au/healthieryou/disaster along with other fact sheets including:
 - *Ensuring safe drinking water*
 - *Controlling mosquito breeding after floods*
- Rainwater tanks – a guide to keeping your tank safe
www.health.qld.gov.au/ph/documents/ehu/32922.pdf
- Emergency Management Queensland
www.emergency.qld.gov.au/emq/css/beprepared.asp
- Emergency Management Australia community awareness publications
www.ema.gov.au/www/emaweb/emaweb.nsf/Page/Publications

For further information, contact your nearest Queensland Health public health unit:

Brisbane North	Tel: 3624 1111	Gold Coast	Tel: 5668 3700	Rockhampton	Tel: 4920 6989
Brisbane South	Tel: 3000 9148	Hervey Bay	Tel: 4120 6000	Sunshine Coast	Tel: 5409 6600
Bundaberg	Tel: 4150 2780	Logan	Tel: 3412 2989	Toowoomba	Tel: 4631 9888
Central West	Tel: 4920 6989	Mackay	Tel: 4885 6611	Townsville	Tel: 4753 9000
Cairns	Tel: 4226 5555	Moreton Bay	Tel: 3142 1800	West Moreton	Tel: 3413 1200
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