

After a Flood

Introduction

Flooding from severe storm activity or cyclones is the most common disaster scenario in Australia.

Public health significance

Following the initial damage to property and infrastructure, flood waters that have receded can still cause death, sickness and injury. Deaths from rare diseases such as *meliodosis* have occurred from previous floods in Queensland. You need to protect your skin from cuts and abrasions that introduce infection from dormant bacteria activated by the flood water.

Playing or wading in flood water is risky. Drowning can occur in fast flowing water as well as in unseen washouts or holes.

Watch out for snakes and spiders that may have hidden inside houses as the flood water rose. Cuts from broken glass and debris are always a problem after floods. ALWAYS wear covered shoes, indoors and out.

Action to take

- Wash hands with soap and water after touching flood water and mud or going to the toilet and before eating or making food.
- Cover any wounds (cuts, abrasions) with bandaids.
- Discard any food that has been in the water, except if it has been in a water proof container (tin or bottle). Wash tins or bottles using one cup of household bleach to a bucket of water. Re-label containers with a marker as the labels come off.
- Sandflies and mosquitos are going to breed rapidly and may become a real nuisance. Cover your skin with long sleeves and long pants and rub your exposed skin with insect repellent.

Clean up

- If there has been a backflow of sewage into the house, wear waterproof gloves and rubber boots during the clean-up.
- Walls and floors should be cleaned with soap and water. Disinfect food contact surfaces (benches and fridges) with disinfectant, using one cup of household bleach to a bucket of water.
- Wash linen and clothing in hot water. Dry mattresses and upholstered furniture in the sun.
- Remove and discard absorbent household materials such as wall coverings, cloth, rugs, gyprock or plasterboard.

**Refer to information on how to "Prepare for cyclone, storm, flood and tsunami now!" at the Emergency Management Queensland website (see "Related Links" below).*

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Acknowledgement:

Information for this document was sourced from the Central Population Health Unit Network Disaster Management Plan.

Related links:

- Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ) at website: www.emergency.qld.gov.au/emq/css/beprepared.asp
- Emergency Management Australia Community Awareness Publications at website: www.ema.gov.au/www/emaweb/emaweb.nsf/Page/Publications
- Workplace Health & Safety Queensland at website: www.deir.qld.gov.au/