

# 8 ways to protect yourself from flood-related health problems:



**1. Gastrointestinal:** Serious conditions such as diarrhea, dysentery, cholera, typhoid fever, hepatitis A, and food poisoning can be contracted from drinking or eating contaminated water and food.

## Symptoms & Treatment

- Fever, diarrhea, vomiting,
- Nausea and bloating, loss of appetite
- Tiredness and fatigue
- Abdominal pain
- Pain around right side of the rib cage
- Dark-colored urine
- Jaundice and yellow-colored eyes
- Skin rash

*If diarrhea starts, drink water with electrolyte. If diarrhea or more of these symptoms persist, seek medical attention.*

## Prevention

- Keep flood water away from your mouth
- Wash hands with soap before eating
- Eat only food that has been cooked recently and watch for discolored or smelly water before washing dishes and rinsing vegetables
- If safe bottled water is unavailable drink only boiled or chemically-treated water
- Do not dispose human waste in flood water. If a working toilet is unavailable, use plastic bags, then seal tightly and throw away in a proper receptacle.

**2. Conjunctivitis (pink eye):** An eye inflammation caused by virus, bacteria, or allergies. Can spread via contaminated water, rubbing eyes with dirty hands, or infected cloth such as a pillowcase.

## Symptoms & Treatment

- Itchy eyes
- Pink-colored eye
- Eye pain, burning, and tears
- Pus-like discharge, which can blur vision and make the eye feel glued shut in the morning

*For relief, apply a clean compress to the affected eye, or use over-the-counter eye drops. See a doctor if symptoms last over 3 days.*

## Prevention

- If dirty water enters eye, flush immediately using clean water
- Avoid touching eyes
- Do not share cosmetics, towels, pillowcases or handkerchiefs.

**3. Skin diseases:** Caused by bacteria or fungus, especially those that grow in damp corners of the skin, such as toes and fingers.

#### Symptoms & Treatment

- Skin inflammation and/or irritation
- Blisters that become itchy and inflamed

*Keep skin clean and dry. If a blister breaks, cover it with a clean bandage and keep dry. If symptoms don't improve, seek medical advice.*

#### Prevention

- After being in flood water, wash your skin thoroughly
- Pay special attention to your feet – keep them dry and wear strong rubber boots offering good traction
- Avoid scratching itchy blisters.

**4. Dangerous bites:** Scorpions, centipedes, poisonous snakes, crocodiles and other animals can be common in flooded areas. Floods can drive animals into normally-safe home environments.

#### Symptoms & Treatment

- Symptoms range from a temporary itching or stinging sensation, to swelling, fever, breathing difficulty and more serious problems, depending on the animal and the victim.

*If bitten by a poisonous insect or animal, wrap the area tightly and immobilize the limb. Loosen briefly every 10 minutes. Seek immediate medical care.*

#### Prevention

- Be careful in dark areas – use bright light when entering areas or while moving furniture.

**5. Dengue fever and malaria:** Spread by infected mosquitoes, which can breed in standing water following a flood. Watch for news of localized outbreaks.

#### Symptoms & Treatment

- High fever
- Joint pain
- Severe headache and/or backache
- Nausea, vomiting
- Eye pain
- Skin rashes
- Bloody nose/bleeding gums

*If you live in or have recently visited an area of an outbreak, and suddenly develop a fever, see a doctor immediately.*

#### Prevention

- Wear long sleeve shirts, long pants and covered shoes
- Spray mosquito repellent and re-apply after being in water
- Apply extra protection around dusk and at night when mosquitoes are more active

## 6. Leptospirosis (Weil's disease, "rat pee infection"):

Contracted through skin contact with infected rodent urine in flood water.

### Symptoms & Treatment

- Headache and fever
- Aching muscles
- Red, irritated eyes
- Jaundiced (yellow) skin
- Swelling of foot instep and the skin around the eyes
- Sensitivity to bright light
- If left untreated, may cause internal bleeding and coma

*If symptoms appear, seek immediate medical attention. DO NOT wait.*

### Prevention

- Wear protection such as rubber boots and waterproof jackets
- Avoid being in dirty water for long periods of time

**7. Respiratory illness:** e.g., Flu, tonsillitis, bronchitis. Spread through contact with infected drops of mucous, saliva or phlegm. Exposure to mold can also trigger asthma attacks and other respiratory problems.

- Fever
- Headache
- Cough
- Fatigue
- Runny nose
- Itchy eyes
- Breathing difficulties, asthmatic reactions

*If cough persists and discolored phlegm develops, consult a doctor. Asthma sufferers should avoid moldy environments and not attempt to clean such environments themselves.*

### Prevention

- Take care of your health by getting sufficient sleep and rest
  - Avoid wearing wet clothing for extended periods
  - Clean and remove mold from small areas, or throw molded items out.
- For large-scale mold problems, seek professional help.

## 8. Accidents and electrical hazards:

- Stay vigilant and always wear rubber and protective boots with good traction while in water
- Broken glass, rusty nails, wood splinters, wires, and holes may be submerged under water or hidden in darkness. Be careful when you step where you cannot see.
- Watch out for exposed electrical wires. Switch off power in all flooded areas.
- Never touch any power cords in electrical outlets if there is water in the area
- Before moving back into a previously-flooded home, have it inspected and repaired by a qualified electrician