



## **AFTER THE FLOOD – PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERNS**

**Q: I am concerned about my well water because the flood surrounded my well and might have gone over the top, what should I do to be sure it is safe still?**

**A:** If the water was just around your well and you have not noticed a change in the looks or smell you should test the water to confirm it is still safe. You can get water testing bottles from several locations in Lewis County including the Lewis County Public Health lab located 360 NW North Street in Chehalis, 360-740-1222. Until you receive your water test results treat your water, for treatment instructions see:

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/331-115-PrinterFriendly.pdf>

**Q: I am concerned about my well water because the flood water went over my well and/or my water has changed (color, smell, or just seems different), is it still safe?**

**A:** Flood water can contain contaminants like fertilizers, bacteria, and chemicals and if the water goes over your well or your well is damaged they can enter the well and contaminate it. Do not drink well water that has changed in some way or was submerged in the flood water. Contact Lewis County Public Health at 360-740-2691 to speak with our trained staff to discuss your situation. Until you know the water is safe do not use it for drinking or food preparation. Use bottled water or see other safe drinking water options on the Lewis County Department of Emergency Management web page.

**Q: I am concerned about my exposure to tetanus, what can I do?**

**A:** If you have had a tetanus shot in the last 10 years you should be okay. If you can't remember when your last tetanus shot was and have been walking through floodwater, cleaning up flood debris, and have some scrapes and/or cuts then you should get a tetanus shot as soon as possible. You can get this taken care of at your regular medical provider's office.

**Q: If I was in floodwater am I at risk for getting Hepatitis A?**

**A:** No, being exposed to floodwater does not increase your risk for contracting Hepatitis A. Many people already have had the Hepatitis A vaccination, if you have not you can also take care of this at your regular medical provider's office.

**Q: How do I know if my food was contaminated?**

**A:** Any foods in contact with floodwaters should be discarded. Fresh produce that has been contaminated should also be thrown out. Canned foods should have labels (which can hold

dirt and germs) removed and be washed in a bleach solution of 1 tablespoon bleach to 1 gallon water. You can re-label the cans with a permanent marker. All utensils and cookware should be sanitized in a bleach solution or boiled in water for 10 minutes. Allow cans and utensils to air dry for at least one hour before opening or storing.

**Q: How can I make sure my home is clean once the floodwaters recede?**

**A:** Use a general disinfectant or even a bleach/water solution to wipe down all surfaces that were covered with floodwater. Wash all the clothing that was exposed to floodwater or mud and dry on high heat if possible. If you have carpeted floors that were flooded you will need to have the carpet cleaned and dried within 24-48 hours or, if the flooding was more severe, removed and discarded.

**Q: Can I shower or bathe in water that maybe contaminated?**

**A:** Yes, unless you have an open wound your risk of exposure is minimal: Your risk of getting sick from contaminated water is greatest if you take the water into your mouth.

## **Keeping Clean and Safe**

Here are 3 simple things you can do to stay clean and safe in an area that might be contaminated:

- Wash your hands - do this a lot especially if you have been outside or been touching something that was on the ground outside. Waterless hand sanitizer is okay to use if your tap water might be contaminated.
- If there was no flooding in your house take your shoes off before going inside. If possible, leave them outside the house on a porch or just inside the house on a piece of plastic that can be disposed of every few days. If pets are allowed outside wash their feet when they enter the house.
- Don't allow kids and pets to play in areas that might be contaminated, which could include your yard if it was covered in flood water. Toys (kid and pet toys) that have been in contact with a contaminated area must be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

**Q: How should I clean something that has been contaminated such as toys?**

**A:** Mix a solution of 1 cup bleach to 5 gallons water to disinfect toys and other solid surfaces such as concrete or decking. Pets that may have been in contaminated areas should be bathed with soap or shampoo.

## **Who can I contact for more information?**

Contact your medical provider if you are having any kind of symptoms, wounds or rashes that you need to have examined. Contact the Lewis County Public Health Department at (360) 740-1222 if you have questions or concerns about the tetanus immunization, your water or septic system, or exposure to contamination.

*Edited 01/10/2022*