



Sept. 25, 2013

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Residents in flooded areas should take health precautions

SARASOTA COUNTY — The Florida Department of Health in Sarasota County (DOH-Sarasota) advises residents and visitors to take precautions against disease-causing organisms that may be in flood waters:

- Avoid eating or drinking anything that has touched flood waters. Wash hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected before preparing or eating food, after toilet use, after participating in flood cleanup activities and after handling items that touched flood water or sewage.
- Do not wade through, play or allow children to play in standing water. If flood water cannot be avoided, bathe and put on clean clothes as soon as possible.
- Avoid contact between flood waters and open cuts or sores. If open cuts or sores come into contact with flood waters, wash thoroughly with soap to control infection. If a wound develops redness, swelling or drainage, seek a medical provider immediately. Anyone who has not had a tetanus vaccination within the past 10 years should get a tetanus booster.
- If there is a backflow of sewage into the home, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Remove and throw away home goods that cannot be thoroughly cleaned, such as wall coverings, cloth items, rugs and drywall. Clean hard surfaces with soap and water, then disinfect with a solution of 1/4 cup of bleach to 1 gallon of water. Thoroughly disinfect food-contact surfaces (counter tops, refrigerators, tables) and areas where small children play. Wash all linens and clothing in hot water. Air dry larger items in the sun and spray them with a disinfectant. Steam clean all carpeting.

DOH-Sarasota recommends the following for those whose water wells have been inundated (flooded) by storm water:

Boil water before use, holding it at rolling boil for at least one minute before using it for drinking, brushing teeth, washing food, cooking, or washing dishes.

- Disinfect water by adding 8 drops (about 1/8 teaspoon — this would form a puddle about the size of a dime) of plain, unscented household bleach (4 to 6 percent active ingredient) per gallon of water, and then let it stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy after 30 minutes, repeat the procedure once. Use a container that has a cap or covering for disinfecting and storing water to be used for drinking. This will prevent contamination.
- Use bottled water, especially for mixing baby formula.

After the flooding subsides:

- Disinfect your well using the procedures provided by the Florida Department of Health:
<http://www.myfloridaeh.com/water/privatewells.html>
- You may also visit the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's website for instructions:
<http://water.epa.gov/drink/info/well/whatdo.cfm>
- Contact DOH-Sarasota's Environmental Health Office to have well water tested for coliform bacteria at www.sarasotahealth.org or call 941-861-6133 for information.
- Visit www.FloridaDisaster.org.

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