

Fact sheet

Stay safe and healthy during flood recovery

Following the initial damage to property and infrastructure, flood water that has receded can still cause sickness and serious injury.

The main health risks while in flood-impacted areas include:

- > injury, such as falls, skin lacerations or snake and spider bites
- > skin infections and sunburn
- > mosquito-borne infections
- > gastrointestinal infections

Follow these safety tips to stay safe and healthy during the clean-up and flood recovery.

Preparing to clean up

- > Wear protective clothing, such as sturdy footwear, loose long-sleeved shirts and trousers, thick gloves, hat and sunglasses.
- > Muddy surfaces can be extremely slippery resulting in falls that can cause fractures and other injuries. Good shoes can help, but also consider using a walking pole or similar, such as a piece of smooth timber (e.g. broom handle or a piece of tree branch).

Working safely onsite

Don't walk or wade through floodwater, if you can avoid it.

- > There is an increased risk of wound infections, dermatitis, conjunctivitis, and ear, nose and throat infections from polluted waters. Leptospirosis and diarrhoeal diseases can also be contracted from flood waters.

Wash your hands and keep wounds covered

- > Wash your hands with soap and water after contact with floodwater or mud, going to the toilet, and before preparing or eating food.
- > Protect your skin from cuts and abrasions which could become infected by contact with flood water.
- > Clean and disinfect all wounds and keep them covered. Consider avoiding all floodwater and mud if you have exposed wounds, especially if you have diabetes or other chronic diseases. Wounds heal most quickly if the limbs are rested and elevated.
- > You may need to consider a tetanus vaccination. If you have any doubts about whether you are fully vaccinated, contact your doctor.

Watch out for mozzies and snakes

- > Mosquitoes and sandflies may become a real nuisance as floodwaters recede. Wear long, light coloured, loose fitting clothing (ideally long pants and sleeves) and use insect repellent containing DEET or Picardin.
- > Mosquitoes can spread serious disease when they bite, such as Ross River Virus and Barmah Forest virus infections. Symptoms caused by these infections may vary in severity from person to person and can include joint pain, rash, fever, fatigue or muscle pain. Anyone suffering from symptoms should contact their doctor for advice.



- > Watch out for snakes and spiders that may have hidden inside houses or debris as the flood waters rose.

Be careful of contaminated water

- > Don't drink floodwater or tank water which may have been contaminated by flood water. In most cases potable mains water will remain safe. If this is not the case you will be formally notified. If in doubt, bring water to a rolling boil (automatic cut-off point on a kettle) and cool before drinking.

Starting the clean-up

- > Wear waterproof gloves, rubber boots and eye protection during the clean-up.
- > Dry out the flood affected house or building as quickly as possible by opening all the doors and windows. If possible use fans to speed up the process.
- > Clean walls and floors with detergent and water.
- > Clean food contact surfaces (benches and fridges) with detergent and water, then disinfect using a solution consisting of one cup of bleach to a bucket of clean water.
- > Clothes should be washed with hot water and detergent, then thoroughly dried.
- > Discard items that cannot be washed. Remove and discard absorbent household materials such as mattresses and upholstered furniture.
- > Take precautions if you are handling asbestos cement debris. Ask local council or SES workers about waste collection and disposal in your local area.
- > Ignore mould growth until the area is completely dry and then remove with a chlorine bleach solution (approximately 250 mls (1 cup) of bleach in four litres of water).

Throw out any unsafe food

- > If the power is off for more than 24 hours, and the freezer has not been stocked with ice, food will start to spoil and should be eaten immediately. What can't be eaten should be thrown out.
- > Throw out any food that has been in contact with flood water.
- > Throw out any food that has started to spoil, especially if it smells bad, tastes strange or is slimy. If in doubt throw it out!
- > Your local council will advise on kerbside collection for flood damaged goods in affected areas once floodwaters recede.

For more information:

Call Health direct Australia on 1800 022 222 to speak to a health professional.

Contact your nearest local council:

- > Alexandrina Council – 8555 7000
- > Berri Barmera Council – 8582 1922
- > Loxton Waikerie Council – 8584 8000
- > Mid Murray Council – 8564 6020
- > Murray Bridge Council – 8539 1100
- > Renmark Paringa Council – 8580 3000

Public Health
Telephone: 08 8226 7100
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