

Flooding and Safety – What You Need to Know

If you suspect you are at risk for flooding, please call the Summit County Sheriff's Office at 435-615-3600.

How to Make Sure Your Water is Safe

If your tap water is coming out of the faucet either cloudy or even brown, boil it for 3 to 5 minutes. If you are on a private well, you may call the Health Department at 435-336-3234 for a free post-flooding test.

- Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula. If possible, use baby formula that does not need to have water added. You can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to wash your hands.
- If you use bottled water, be sure it came from a safe source. If you do not know that the water came from a safe source, you should boil or treat it before you use it. Use only bottled, boiled, or treated water until your supply is tested and found safe.
- Boiling water, when practical, is the preferred way to kill harmful bacteria and parasites. Bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute will kill most organisms.
- When boiling water is not practical, you can treat water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or unscented household chlorine bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite):
- If you use chlorine tablets or iodine tablets, follow the directions that come with the tablets.
- If you use household chlorine bleach, add 1/8 teaspoon (~0.75 mL) of bleach per gallon of water if the water is clear. For cloudy water, add 1/4 teaspoon (~1.50 mL) of bleach per gallon. Mix the solution thoroughly and let it stand for about 30 minutes before using it.

Note: Treating water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or liquid bleach will not kill parasitic organisms.

How to Make Sure Your Food is Safe

Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water. For infants, use only pre-prepared canned baby formula that requires no added water, rather than powdered formulas prepared with treated water. Thawed food can usually be eaten or refrozen if it is still "refrigerator cold," or if it still contains ice crystals. To be safe, remember, "When in doubt, throw it out." Discard any refrigerated or frozen food that has been at room temperature for two hours or more, and any food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture.

How to Avoid Illness

Always wash your 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 articles contaminated with flood water or sewage. If you receive a puncture wound or a wound contaminated with feces, soil, or saliva, have a doctor or health department determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary.

How to Deal With Chemical Hazards

Be aware of potential chemical hazards you may encounter during flood recovery. Flood waters may have buried or moved hazardous chemical containers of solvents or other industrial chemicals from their normal storage places. If any propane tanks (whether 20-lb. tanks from a gas grill or household propane tanks) are discovered, do not attempt to move them yourself. These represent a very real danger of fire or explosion, and if any are found, police or fire departments or your State Fire Marshal's office should be contacted immediately. Car batteries, even those in flood water, may still contain an electrical charge and should be removed with extreme caution by using insulated gloves. Avoid coming in contact with any acid that may have spilled from a damaged car battery.

What to do with Your Septic System after a Flood

Once floodwaters have receded, there are several things homeowners should remember:

- Do not drink well water until it is tested. Contact the Health Department at 435-333-1584.
- Do not use the sewage system until water in the soil absorption field is lower than the water level around the house.
- Have your septic tank professionally inspected and serviced if you suspect damage. Signs of damage include settling or an inability to accept water. Most septic tanks are not damaged by flooding since they are below ground and completely covered. However, septic tanks and pump chambers can fill with silt and debris, and must be professionally cleaned. If the soil absorption field is clogged with silt, a new system may have to be installed.
- Only trained specialists should clean or repair septic tanks because tanks may contain dangerous gases. Contact the Health Department at 435-333-1584 for a list of septic system contractors who work in your area.
- If sewage has backed up into the basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor. Use a chlorine solution of a half cup of chlorine bleach to each gallon of water to disinfect the area thoroughly.
- Pump the septic system as soon as possible after the flood. Be sure to pump both the tank and lift station. This will remove silt and debris that may have washed into the system. Do not pump the tank during flooded or saturated drainfield conditions. At best, pumping the tank is only a temporary solution. Under worst conditions, pumping it out could cause the tank to try to float out of the ground and may damage the inlet and outlet pipes.
- Do not compact the soil over the soil absorption field by driving or operating equipment in the area. Saturated soil is especially susceptible to compaction, which can reduce the soil absorption field's ability to treat wastewater and lead to system failure.
- Examine all electrical connections for damage before restoring electricity.
- Be sure the septic tank's manhole cover is secure and that inspection ports have not been blocked or damaged.
- Check the vegetation over your septic tank and soil absorption field. Repair erosion damage and sod or reseed areas as necessary to provide turf grass cover.

For more information please visit www.summitcountyhealth.org or call 435-333-1500.