

# Stay safe and healthy during flood recovery

Following the initial damage to property and infrastructure, water left behind from flooding can cause sickness and serious injury. Adopting simple practices and precautions will minimise risks to your health.

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

- > drowning.
- > injuries, including those caused by falls, skin lacerations, and snake and spider bites.
- > skin infections.
- > mosquito-borne infections.
- > gastrointestinal infections.

Follow these tips to stay safe and healthy during 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 and can result in falls that may cause fractures and other injuries. Good shoes can help but also consider using a walking pole or something similar, like a piece of smooth timber, a 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. Diarrhoeal diseases can also be contracted from floodwaters. All these risks can be minimised with good hygiene practices. If you come into contact with contaminated floodwater, wash affected areas of the body thoroughly with clean water and soap.

### **Wash your hands and keep wounds covered.**

Wash your hands with soap and water

- > after contact with floodwater or mud.
- > after going to the toilet.
- > before preparing or eating food.

Wear protective clothing and take all necessary precautions to prevent cuts and abrasions, which could become infected by contact with floodwater.

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 mosquitoes and snakes.

Mosquitoes and flies 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, picaridin, or oil of lemon eucalyptus (PMD). Prevent mosquitoes from breeding by cleaning up any standing water around the home and ensure that screens are fitted to windows and doors. For more information, visit

[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/FightTheBite](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/FightTheBite).

Mosquitoes can spread serious diseases such as Ross River virus, Barmah Forest virus, Murray Valley Encephalitis virus and Japanese Encephalitis virus. Symptoms caused by these infections may vary in severity from person to person and can include joint pain, rash, fever, fatigue, or muscle pain to more severe neurological symptoms, brain infection, and death. Anyone suffering from symptoms should contact their doctor for advice.

Watch out for snakes, spiders and other pests that may have hidden inside houses or amongst debris as the floodwaters rose.

### Be careful of contaminated water.

Don't drink floodwater or tank water which may have been contaminated by floodwater. 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. If you believe your rainwater tank has been contaminated, please contact SA Health's Water Quality Branch on 8226 7100.

### Starting the clean-up

- > Wear protective clothing including waterproof gloves, rubber boots and eye protection during the clean-up.
- > Dry out flood-affected houses or buildings 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, like benches and fridges, with detergent and water, then disinfect them using a solution consisting of one cup of bleach to a bucket of clean water.
- > Clothes should be washed with hot water and detergent, and 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.

### Throw out any unsafe food

- > Throw out any food that has been in contact with floodwater.
- > 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 cannot be eaten should be thrown out.
- > If perishable foods (e.g., cooked, raw or deli meats, cooked rice, pasta and potato, dairy products) have been kept at warm temperatures for more than 4 hours they may be unsafe and should be discarded. Remember that appearance, smell and taste are not reliable indicators of safe food so, **if in doubt throw it out!**
- > Before use, thoroughly clean and sanitise any utensils, crockery and cutlery that may have been in contact with flood water.
- > Your local council will advise on kerbside collection for flood-damaged goods in affected areas once floodwaters recede.
- > For more information, visit [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/foodsafety](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/foodsafety).

## On-site wastewater systems

- > If your on-site wastewater system has been under flood water, don't use fixtures that are connected to it until all components have been inspected and repaired.
- > Have your system professionally inspected and serviced once the ground is no longer soaked.
- > Your septic tank may need to be pumped out by a licenced contractor, and cleaned to remove excess silt.
- > DON'T pump out the tank yourself. This is illegal and can cause it to pop out of the ground under the right conditions (e.g., if the ground is still saturated, or if the tank was recently installed and the soil around it hasn't yet compacted). Damage to components, such as the inlet and outlet, can also occur.
- > A professional agent can best advise when your wastewater system is ready for use again.
- > Take care around irrigated water from an aerated treatment system, as treatment may be compromised until the system is re-established.
- > For information on cleaning up after a wastewater overflow please see our web page on 'domestic wastewater overflows'.

## Important contacts:

- > Call Health direct Australia on 1800 022 222 to speak to a health professional.
- > In a medical emergency, call telephone Triple Zero (000) for emergency assistance.
- > For general public health information, contact SA Health on telephone: 08 8226 7100 or visit [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au).
- > For information specific to your local area, contact your local council.

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## For more information

**Health Protection Programs**  
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[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au)



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