

Flooding and Diarrheal Illnesses

If I live in an area affected by flooding, why should I be concerned about diarrheal illnesses?

If you drink water from a well that has been contaminated with flood waters, or from any other contaminated source, you might develop a gastrointestinal disorder (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, etc.) from viruses, bacteria, or other microorganisms (germs) that may be in the water. You can also become ill from germs on your hands or in contaminated food. Some germs can cause illness when only a few of them are swallowed.

What can I do to protect myself and my family from this?

Make sure your drinking water is safe, whether from a public system or a private well. Observe “boil water” and other notices about your water supply. Private wells in flooded areas should be tested by the health department. Check with your public water system to find out the results of tests on their water.

Don’t eat spoiled or contaminated food.

Practice good personal hygiene. Wash your hands carefully with soap and water after using the bathroom and before eating and make sure that your other family members do too. If you do not have clean water, use an antibacterial hand gel.

Should I see a doctor if I get diarrhea?

Most cases of mild diarrhea can be managed at home if you drink plenty of liquids so that you don’t become dehydrated. However, if you or any of your family members — particularly small children and the elderly — have moderate to severe diarrhea (more than 4 or 5 watery stools per day), any bloody diarrhea, fever over 100 degrees, or a diarrheal illness that lasts longer than 3 days, see a doctor.

Is it important to find out what caused my illness?

If your illness is serious enough to see a health care provider, it is important to try to find what caused it. Finding the source of the problem can help determine how to best treat your illness and how to protect others from becoming ill. If there is an outbreak of diarrheal disease in a community, it is especially important to identify the specific germ and where it came from in order to stop the spread of illness throughout the community.