

HEALTH CARE PRECAUTIONS IMPORTANT DURING FLOOD

As clean-up efforts continue following this past week's flooding, officials with the West Virginia Bureau for Public Health say special precautions should be taken for health care needs.

The focus now is on controlling injuries, illness or disease outbreaks. Frequent hand washing with soap and clean water will help prevent illness. Injuries are one of the biggest potential problems during a flood. The first rule of thumb is never walk or drive into moving water if you don't know how deep it is. As you're doing your cleaning, make sure you pace yourself and don't tire yourself out. Other ways to prevent injuries include wearing protective clothing such as heavy footwear, gloves and long sleeves. Before entering any building that has been flooded, check its foundation for cracks that could indicate shifting and make sure the surface you are about to stand on is stable. Don't take small children to flood clean-up sites because it's usually impossible to provide adequate supervision to prevent potentially serious or life-threatening injuries to youngsters.

When using cleaning supplies, never combine bleach and ammonia; this combination can create deadly toxic fumes. Always make sure the area where you are using heavy duty cleaning solutions is well ventilated to keep from being overcome by fumes.

It's also important to make sure food and water supplies are safe for consumption. Eating or drinking contaminated products can cause varying degrees of symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. If you do experience these symptoms, it's important to drink plenty of safe fluids to keep from getting dehydrated.

Several public water systems are under "boil water advisories" and people with private water systems such as wells are being warned to disinfect their water before using it. Perishable foods should be thrown out if they have been without refrigeration for four or more hours, and foods that have thawed or partially thawed should also be destroyed. Foods sealed in airtight tin cans can be salvaged, but cans should be thoroughly disinfected before they are opened. That should be done by first removing the can label and washing the can with a detergent, then rinsing it in clean water. Then submerge the can in a disinfectant of two tablespoons of household bleach per one gallon of water, and rinse again with clean water. Home-canned foods should be destroyed because their screw-on lids cannot properly protect the food from contamination.

For additional help or information on flood clean-up activities, call your local health department or the Bureau's Public Health Sanitation Division at (304) 558-2981 or 1-800-922-1255.