



Southwest District Health

920 Main St. Caldwell, Idaho 83605-3700 PHONE (208) 455-5300 FAX (208) 454-7722

PREPARING FOR FLOODS FACT SHEET

Before Flooding Occurs

- Find out if you live in a flood zone. If so, make sure you have flood insurance. Keep important documents and valuables in a safe deposit box.
- Assemble a supply kit – it should include a first aid kit, essential medications, extra clothing, blankets, battery-powered radio, flashlight, whistle, extra batteries, canned food, can opener, three gallons of water per person, pet food, hand sanitizer, and any special items for infants, elderly, or disabled family members. Don't forget cash in case ATM's won't function. For infants, have pre-made infant formula in case there is a lack of safe water. Also, you should have chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or unscented household chlorine bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite). Write down a list of prescription medication used by each family member. Keep the prescriptions up to date.
- Talk to family members about what each member should do in case of a flood. Choose safe places to go if you need to evacuate. These could be a friend's house or a motel. Prepare a contact list of friends and relatives. If you are forced to evacuate, you will have their contact information. Don't forget your pets.
- If you have a private well, make sure it is up to code. The well casing should be at least 18 inches above the ground with the ground sloped away. The top should be covered with a sanitary seal in good condition. To check, grab the "lid" and see if it moves. If a seal is properly fitted, you should not be able to move it. There should be a rubber gasket between the "lid" and the metal casing. Make sure there are no cracks in the exposed casing or the "lid".
- If you have a septic system, make sure it is full of liquid. A high water season is not the time to pump the tank out. Empty tanks can be buoyant when water builds up under and around the tank. The tank can actually "pop" out of the ground during a flood.
- If you have a basement, you may need to plug floor drains to keep sewage from backing up. Floodwaters can still leak through cracks and seams in the basement walls.
- Know how to turn off electrical power, natural gas, or propane tanks in case there is a risk of floodwater overtaking any electrical outlets or circuits, furnaces, or water heaters. A professional will need to check the electrical system prior to turning it back on. The gas company will have to come out to turn the gas back on after determining it is safe to do so.
- Make sure pesticides and other hazardous chemicals are stored high and safely contained.

During a Flood

- Listen to local radio and TV stations. If you are told to evacuate, do so immediately.
- If you have a septic system, do not flush or run water through sinks and toilets. If you have a septic system that requires power, turn off the electrical circuit.
- **Remember: DO NOT drink water from your well if it has been submerged by flood water.** It will need to be tested to see if it is safe. If you are on a municipal water system, check with the municipality office to make sure the water hasn't been contaminated. If you do not have access to safe water, you can try to boil or treat the well or municipal water. Do not use floodwater for drinking or washing hands as there will be microorganisms, parasites, and chemicals contaminating the water. If practical, boil the water for at least one minute. This will kill both microorganisms and parasites, but will not remove any chemical contamination. If you use chlorine or iodine tablets, follow the directions with the packaging. If you use household bleach, add 1/8 teaspoon of bleach per gallon of water if the water is clear. For cloudy water, add 1/4 teaspoon per gallon of water. Stir and let sit for at least 30 minutes before using. Remember: treating water chemically will not kill parasites like giardia and cryptosporidium.
- Do not allow children to play in the floodwater as it will contain harmful organisms, chemical contamination, and physical hazards.

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After the Flood

- Use extreme caution when entering a previously flooded area. If you discover any chemical containers or propane tanks, do not move them yourself. Call your local police office.
- If you receive a puncture wound during clean-up, contact a doctor or the health department to determine if a tetanus booster will be necessary.
- If you have a septic system, do not use until water has receded. The septic tank may require to be pumped out. If the ground has been washed away and the septic system is exposed, contact the health department to inspect prior to using.
- Do not pump water out of basements too quickly. Exterior water pressure could collapse the walls.
- Throw out any food, canned or otherwise, that has come in contact with flood water. If the refrigerator or freezer was not working, throw out all perishable food if it has been kept in temperatures over 40°F for longer than two hours.
- If your well was submerged by flood water, do not use the water without boiling or treating until your well is tested or the municipality can ensure the water is safe to drink. If you need to disinfect your well, contact Southwest District Health at (208) 455-5400.
- Walls, hard-surfaced floors, and other surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water and disinfected with a solution of ½ cup bleach to 1 gallon water. Do not mix chlorine bleach with soap or other ammonia based products. This will cause a toxic gas to form.
- Wash all linens and clothing in hot water. Steam clean all carpeting. Discard any items that cannot be steam cleaned or adequately cleaned and disinfected. Be especially vigilant cleaning areas and toys used by children.
- Make sure to wear goggles, N-95 respirator mask, rubber boots, and waterproof gloves during cleanup, especially if sewage backed up in the house.
- If mold growth is severe, especially on walls, you may need to hire a disaster clean-up company.
- Make sure to have a professional check over your furnace, air conditioner, and water heater if they were in contact with flood water. Do not turn on until they are properly checked. If you use natural gas, do not turn it back on yourself. The gas company must come and check out the site and turn it back on.

Other Resources:

Centers for Disease Control – www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters//floods

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) – www.fema.gov

American Red Cross – www.redcross.org

National Weather Service – www.nws.noaa.gov

Southwest District Health – www.swdh.org