



State of Wisconsin  
Department of Health Services

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Scott Walker, Governor  
Kitty Rhoades, Secretary

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## After the Flood: Use Caution During Clean-Up

MADISON – The Department of Health Services (DHS) is urging residents and crews to use extreme caution while assessing damage or removing debris after severe storms caused major flooding in northern Wisconsin. Governor Scott Walker declared a State of Emergency this week after heavy rains caused flash flooding, power outages, and damage in Ashland, Bayfield, Burnett, Douglas, Iron, Price, Sawyer, and Washburn Counties.

“Even after the flood waters have receded, many health risks remain,” said DHS Interim Secretary Tom Engels. “Members of our emergency preparedness and response staff are serving at the State Emergency Operations Center working with other state agencies to assist those in the area affected by the devastating storms and floods. We are also working with local health departments to make sure they have the information and assistance they need to ensure a safe response.”

Flood waters may contain high levels of raw sewage or other hazardous substances like fertilizer, gasoline, and pesticides. People should not swim, bathe, or wade in lakes, rivers, or streams, or any other waters affected by flooding. People should exercise caution while assessing damage or cleaning up after a storm as they may encounter downed power lines, broken glass, and many other hazards. Residents should avoid entering buildings damaged by flood until these have been checked by the gas and electric utility and a licensed contractor, or building inspector, to make sure it is safe for re-entry.

Contaminated wells often pose a threat to people’s health after flooding. Well owners who observe flooding near their well or changes in their water should assume their wells are contaminated and not use the water for drinking, cooking, or bathing. People should wait until floodwaters recede before disinfecting the well and then test to make sure the water is safe to use again. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides guidance on how to cope with a flooded well: <http://dnr.wi.gov/emergency/FloodCoping.html>.

Other ways to avoid injury and illness during flood cleanup include:

- Wear sturdy shoes or boots, long sleeves and gloves when handling or walking on or near debris.
- If you suspect any damage to your home, shut off electrical power, natural gas and propane tanks to avoid fire, electrocution, or explosions.
- If the power is out, use battery-powered lanterns to light homes rather than candles. Candles could trigger an explosion if there is a gas leak.
- Never use gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices like camp stoves or generators inside the home, or even outside near an open window, door, or vent. Carbon monoxide from these sources can cause illness and death.
- Make sure your tetanus shots are up-to-date. Tetanus is caused by bacteria and often enters the body through puncture wounds, like those caused by nails.
- Avoid driving or walking through areas that were flooded. Floodwaters often erode roads and walkways.
- Use extreme caution when entering buildings as there may be hidden damage, particularly to foundations.

- Be aware that water damage often leads to unhealthy mold growth. Consult a professional with flood cleanup experience to assess how serious a mold problem is, and the best way to remove it.
- Keep food safety in mind. Refrigerated and frozen foods should be inspected, especially if there was a power outage, and "when in doubt, throw it out." For more information on ensuring food safety following a flood, go to <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/flood/reentering.htm>.
- Residents whose homes have been flooded can obtain American Red Cross cleanup kits that contain items like mops, sponges, garbage bags, gloves, and bleach to assist them with clean up. People should contact their local health departments for more information.

More resources related to staying safe during and after a flood can be found at:

<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/flood/index.htm>.

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