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## Returning home when flood waters ebb

**OLYMPIA** — Returning to a home or office after a flood can pose a number of health concerns.

Flood waters are contaminated. According to the Washington State Department of Health, there's a risk of disease from eating or drinking anything contaminated with flood water.

Whenever a private wellhead is flooded during a storm the owner should assume the water is contaminated with bacteria and parasites. They should use bottled, disinfected, or boiled water until the well can be tested or disinfected. Information about [private wells](#) can be found online ([www.epa.gov/safewater/privatewells/booklet/](http://www.epa.gov/safewater/privatewells/booklet/)).

Health advisories remain in effect for 13 water systems in Pacific, Lewis, Cowlitz, Clallam, Whatcom, King, Snohomish, Kittitas, and Yakima counties. Customers should continue to follow advice to boil drinking water until notified by their water supplier that the water is safe.

As of this morning, more than 6,800 people are under boil-water advisories; about 90 have no water; and service has been restored to more than 2,200 people.

People served by a system that's subject to a boil-water advisory should boil tap water for one minute before using it to drink, make ice, brush teeth, prepare food, or wash dishes. Customers should continue to take this precaution until notified the water is safe to drink.

When entering a building that had been flooded, be sure all electrical power and natural gas or propane tanks are **off** to avoid fire or explosions. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open all windows, and leave immediately. Notify the gas company or the police or fire departments; do not return to the house until you are told it is safe.

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It's important to keep children and pets out of contaminated areas until the cleanup is done.

Wearing rubber boots and rubber gloves, as well as goggles, will help people working on cleanup from exposure to contamination. People working on flood cleanup should also be up-to-date on their immunizations. They may be at risk of tetanus, and should've had a tetanus vaccine within the last 10 years. Influenza vaccine is important for anyone over six months of age, especially for people living in group settings like a shelter.

Indoor mold is a health hazard that may develop after floodwaters recede:

- Throw out things that can't be washed and disinfected (mattresses, carpeting, rugs, carpet padding, upholstered furniture, cosmetics, stuffed animals, baby toys, pillows, foam-rubber items, books, wall coverings, and most paper products, for example).
- Replace drywall and insulation that has been contaminated with sewage or flood waters.
- Thoroughly clean all hard surfaces (such as flooring, concrete, molding, wood and metal furniture, countertops, appliances, sinks, and other plumbing fixtures).
- Mold can grow on any surface, including walls, ceilings, carpets, and paints, so it may take a variety of cleaning approaches. Bleach and soap with water will clean most surfaces.
- If a moldy smell can be sensed, there is mold around. After cleaning visibly moldy areas, allow them to dry.

Undamaged commercial canned food that doesn't have extensive rusting can be cleaned.

Remove labels, wash the can with a scrub brush and detergent, and then rinse in clean water. The cans should be sanitized by swabbing or dipping in bleach solution for 15 minutes, and then air dried. Home canned foods; food packaged in paper, cardboard, or containers with screw top lids or flip tops, and unpackaged foods such as fruit, potatoes, and squash should be thrown away.

After handling items contaminated with floodwater or sewage during the cleanup, wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected — especially when preparing food. Wash contaminated clothes in hot water and detergent — separate from uncontaminated items.

Information on disposing of [storm debris and damaged household goods](#) is available online ([www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/hwtr/Floods/flood\\_debris.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/hwtr/Floods/flood_debris.html)).

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