

Floodwater, pollution from sewage, power outages, and other storm-related hazards can create health risks. Here are tips for protecting your health during storms and heavy rains.

ONSITE SEWAGE (SEPTIC) SYSTEMS

Septic systems may not operate properly if soil in the drainfield area becomes saturated or is flooded. If your drainfield is very wet or under water, reduce indoor water until the ground dries out. Overusing a septic system while the drainfield is flooded may cause sewage to back up into the house or rise to the surface in your drainfield area.

- Spread out water use during the day and week to even out water flow to the drainfield.
- Refrain from using the washing machine, cut back on toilet flushes, and reduce bathing.
- Identify and repair all leaky plumbing fixtures. A running toilet or a leaky faucet can discharge many gallons of extra water each day to the drainfield.
- Identify and repair all leaky septic tanks, risers, etc.
- Divert all surface waters and downspouts away from the septic system.
- Do not have your tanks pumped while water levels are still elevated.
- If you have an alternative system, contact your maintenance specialist once the septic area dries out to have the system evaluated.
- If you have a gravity system, you may wish to have your system evaluated once the area dries out.



CONTACT A SEPTIC MAINTENANCE SPECIALIST

A certified maintenance specialist can check your system and make any needed fixes. Find a list of local contractors by scanning the code at left code with a smartphone camera. Call Kitsap Public Health at 360-728-2235 if you need assistance accessing this list.

DEALING WITH FLOODWATER

Floodwater can carry disease-causing organisms and other types of pollution. To avoid illness:

- Avoid direct contact with floodwater and wear protective equipment when working around floodwater.
- Wash skin thoroughly with soap and clean water if you have contact with floodwater or handle contaminated items.
- Discard all food that has come in contact with floodwater. Canned food is safe to use, but disinfect cans by wiping them with bleach water before use.

SAFE GENERATOR USE

Incorrect generator use can lead to carbon monoxide poisoning, electric shock, or fire.

- Follow directions supplied with the generator.
- Don't overload your generator.
- Only use portable generators and barbecues outdoors. Using these appliances inside can cause carbon monoxide poisoning and death.

Learn more at doh.wa.gov/carbonmonoxide

SHELLFISH SAFETY

Stormwater can pollute shellfish beds. Eating contaminated shellfish can make you sick.

- Do not harvest shellfish from shorelines near populated areas during — and for at least five days after — heavy rainfall.
- Always check the state shellfish safety map before harvesting. Go to doh.wa.gov/shellfishsafety

DRINKING WATER SAFETY AND DISINFECTION

Floodwater can contaminate drinking water, making it unsafe to use. To avoid illness:

- Store one gallon of water per person, per day to be prepared for storms and emergencies.
- **Public water systems:** If there is flooding, local authorities or water system operators may recommend using only bottled, boiled, or disinfected water until regular water service is restored.
- **Private wells / small water systems:** If a drinking water well is flooded, Kitsap Public Health advises residents use bottled water that has been stored less than six months in tightly sealed containers, or take steps to disinfect well water. If your drinking water well is flooded, assume the water in your home is contaminated. Wells may require disinfection if flooded.

PURIFYING DRINKING WATER BY BOILING

- If your tap water is unsafe, boiling is the best method to kill organisms that cause illness.
- Cloudy water should be filtered before boiling. Use coffee filters, paper towels, cheesecloth or a cotton plug in a funnel.
- Bring the water to a rolling boil for at least 1 minute.
- Let the water cool before drinking.
- Add two drops of household bleach per gallon to maintain water quality while in storage.

PURIFYING DRINKING WATER WITH BLEACH

- Treat water by adding liquid household bleach.
- Household bleach is typically between 5.25% and 8.25% chlorine. Read the label.
- Avoid using bleaches that contain perfumes, dyes and other additives. Be sure to read the label.
- Cloudy water should be filtered before adding bleach.
- Place the water in a clean container. Add 1/4 teaspoon of bleach to 1 gallon of water, or 1 teaspoon of bleach to 5 gallons of water.
- Mix thoroughly and let stand for at least 1 hour before drinking.
- Add two drops of household bleach per gallon to maintain water quality while in storage.

FOOD SAFETY DURING A POWER OUTAGE

Food in your refrigerator and freezer may not be safe to eat if your power has been out for an extended period.

- Use a thermometer to check the temperature of foods in your refrigerator and freezer. Refrigerated foods should be 41°F or colder and frozen foods should be 0°F or colder.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to conserve cold air or keep food cold with ice or dry ice. During a power outage, a full freezer will hold its temperature for about 48 hours or about 24 hours if it is half-full. A refrigerator will keep food safe for about 4 hours.
- If you plan to eat refrigerated or frozen meat, poultry, fish, or eggs while they are still at safe temperatures, cook them thoroughly to ensure any harmful bacteria are destroyed.

When in doubt, throw it out! Never taste food to determine its safety. The following foods should be discarded if you decide to throw food away:

- Meat, poultry, or seafood products
- Eggs and egg products
- Soft cheeses and shredded cheeses
- Dough and cooked pasta
- Milk, cream, yogurt, and other dairy products
- Cooked or cut produce
- Opened baby formula

Learn more at foodsafety.gov/emergency or doh.wa.gov/foodsafety

SIGN UP FOR HEALTH ADVISORIES:

Sign up to receive public health advisories by email or text at kitsappublichealth.org/subscribe

MORE RESOURCES:

Find local updates and resources regarding coastal flooding at kcowa.us/kccoastal