

## PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

December 8, 2015

### Important health reminders during heavy rains and storms

KITSAP COUNTY, WA—Due to widespread and significant rainfall over the last several days, and heavy rains expected through the end of the week, the Kitsap Public Health District is advising the public to be aware of the following health risks associated with excessive surface (stormwater) runoff, flooding or sewage spills.

- Flood waters often carry disease-causing organisms and other types of pollutants, requiring precautions to prevent illness.
- If your drinking water well is flooded, assume that the water in your home is contaminated.
- Septic systems may not function properly and/or are vulnerable to failure during flood conditions requiring measures to protect these systems.
- Shellfish should not be harvested from urban embayments during periods of heavy rain due to contaminated stormwater runoff that may pollute marine waters and shellfish beds.

#### DRINKING WATER SAFETY

If a drinking water well is flooded, Kitsap Public Health advises to use bottled water that has been stored less than six months in tightly sealed containers, or take preventive measures to sanitize the potentially contaminated water. Plan for one gallon of water per person, per day.

- If contaminated water is clear, boil it for one minute to kill disease-causing bacteria and parasites, or add ½ teaspoon household bleach per gallon of water and let it sit for ½ hour.
- If contaminated water is cloudy, pour it through a coffee filter, paper towel, or cheesecloth, and then boil it for one minute. If you can't boil it, filter it and add ¼ teaspoon of bleach per gallon, then let it sit for one hour.

Wells may [require disinfection](#) if flooded.

#### ON-SITE SEWAGE / SEPTIC SYSTEMS

Septic systems may not operate properly if soil in the drainfield area becomes saturated. If your drainfield is very wet or under water, reduce your indoor water use to critical uses only to prevent failure of the system. Overusing a septic system when the drainfield is

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flooded may cause sewage to back-up into the house or come up to the ground surface in your drainfield area. When soil has dried sufficiently, it's probably safe to resume normal water use. During extreme wet weather, property owners can follow several simple measures to protect their septic systems and their property investments including:

- Minimize water use in the home as much as possible. Stay well below your sewage system's maximum volume capacity, normally 120 gallons of water use per bedroom per day.
- Spread water use throughout the day and week to even out water flow to your 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 your drainfield.
- Identify and repair all leaky septic tanks, risers, etc.
- Divert all surface waters and downspouts away from your sewage system.

### **DEALING WITH FLOOD WATER**

Because floodwaters may be contaminated, if the home is flooded, Kitsap Public Health recommends that people:

- Wash their hands with soap and disinfected water before preparing or eating food or handling contaminated items.
- Discard all food that has come in contact with floodwater. Canned food is all right, but disinfect the can before opening.

### **FOOD SAFETY DURING A POWER OUTAGE**

If the power has gone out:

- Keep food safe by using food that spoils rapidly first. Most foodborne diseases are caused by bacteria in raw or undercooked foods of animal origin such as meat, milk, eggs, or fish.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to conserve cold air or keep food cold with ice or dry ice.

Additional information is available online at [www.kitsappublichealth.org](http://www.kitsappublichealth.org), or by calling Kitsap Public Health at (360) 337-5235.

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