

PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

October 12, 2016

Important health reminders during heavy rains and storms

KITSAP COUNTY, WA—Due to the heavy rains and wind expected this week and weekend, the Kitsap Public Health District is advising the public to be aware of the following health risks associated with bad weather, power outages, excessive surface (stormwater) runoff, flooding or sewage spills.

DO NOT HARVEST SHELLFISH: Shellfish should not be harvested from urban embayments during and for at least five days after heavy rainfall due to stormwater runoff that may pollute marine waters and shellfish beds.

DRINKING WATER SAFETY AND DISINFECTION

To plan ahead for bad weather and emergencies, store 1 gallon of water per person, per day.

Public water systems: If there is flooding, local authorities may recommend using only bottled water, boiled water, or disinfected water until regular water service is restored.

Private wells / small public water systems: 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. If your drinking water well is flooded, assume that the water in your home is contaminated. Wells may [require disinfection](#) if flooded.

Purifying by boiling

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

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Purifying with bleach

- Treat water by adding liquid household bleach, such as Clorox or Purex.
- Household bleach is typically between 5.25 percent and 8.25 percent 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 1-2 drops of bleach per gallon of water.
- Mix thoroughly and let stand for at least 60 minutes before drinking.

ON-SITE SEWAGE (SEPTIC SYSTEMS)

Septic systems may not operate properly if soil in the drainfield area becomes saturated or if it is flooded. 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 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:

- 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

Flood waters often carry disease-causing organisms and other types of pollutants, requiring precautions to prevent illness. 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 after handling contaminated items.
- Discard all food that has come in contact with floodwater. Canned food is all right, but disinfect the can by wiping it off with bleach water before opening.

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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.

GENERATOR USE DURING A POWER OUTAGE

Incorrect generator use can lead to carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning from the toxic engine exhaust, electric shock or electrocution and fire.

- Follow the directions supplied with the generator.
- Don't overload your generator.
- Never use portable generators or barbecues indoors.

Additional resources are available online at www.kitsappublichealth.org, on [the Kitsap County inclement weather and emergency page](#), and at <http://www.kitsapdem.org/>.

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For more information contact:

Karen McKay Bevers | Public Information Officer

Kitsap Public Health District

345 6th St., Suite 300 | Bremerton, WA 98337

(360) 307-4252 Office | (360) 337-5235 Main

karen.bevers@kitsappublichealth.org | kitsappublichealth.org