



Charlie Crist
Governor

Ana M. Viamonte Ros, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary of Health

For Immediate Release

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FLOOD WATERS POSE HEALTH RISKS

Fort Walton Beach – Heavy rains are causing flooding in various areas of our county. Although skin contact with flood waters does not, by itself, pose a serious health risk, health hazards are a concern when waters become contaminated. Flood waters may contain fecal material, associated bacteria and viruses.

The FL Department of Health and the Okaloosa County Health Department recommends the following precautions to prevent possible illness from flood waters:

- Basic hygiene is critical. Wash your hands with soap and clean water before preparing or eating food, after toilet use, after participating in flood cleanup activities, and after handling articles contaminated with flood water or sewage.
- Avoid eating or drinking anything that has been contaminated with flood waters.
- Do not wade through standing water. If you do, bathe and put on clean clothes as soon as possible.
- Do not drive through flooded roadways. It only takes one to two feet of flowing water to push a car off the road. TURN AROUND DON'T DROWN.
- Avoid contact with flood waters if you have open cuts or sores. If you have any open cuts or sores and cannot avoid contact with flood waters, keep them as clean as possible by washing well with soap to control infection. If a wound develops redness, swelling, or drainage, seek immediate medical attention. Residents who sustain lacerations and/or puncture wounds and have not had a tetanus vaccination within the past 10 years require a tetanus booster.
- If there is a backflow of sewage into your house, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Remove and discard absorbent household materials, such as wallcoverings, cloth, rugs, and sheetrock. Clean walls and hard-surfaced floors with soap and water and disinfect with a solution of 1/4 cup of bleach to one gallon of water. Thoroughly disinfect food contact surfaces (counter tops, refrigerators, tables) and areas where small children play. Wash all linens and clothing in hot water. Air dry larger items in the sun and spray them with a disinfectant. Steam-clean all carpeting.

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If your home is on a septic tank and your plumbing is functioning slowly or sluggishly, you should:

- Conserve water as much as possible; the less water used the less sewage the septic tank must process. Minimize use of your washing machine. Go to a Laundromat.
- If sewage has backed-up into your home or into your yard, stay out of the affected areas and keep children and pets away.
- If you cannot use your plumbing without creating a sanitary nuisance in your home or yard, i.e., without sewage being exposed, consider moving to an alternate location until conditions improve.
- If you have a septic system that operates by a dosing pump, it will not function without electricity. You should refrain from using water in your home as much as possible until electricity is restored. Without the pump working, the tanks will fill and may cause backups of sewage in your home.
- Do not have the septic tank pumped. Exceptionally high water tables might crush a septic tank that is pumped dry. If the fundamental problem is high ground water, pumping the tank does nothing to solve that problem.
- Do not have the septic tank and drainfield repaired until the ground has dried. Often systems are completely functional when unsaturated conditions return. Any repair must be permitted and inspected by your county health department.

If you are having problems in areas served by sewer systems, please contact your utility company to insure they are aware of problems in your area.

For further information, please contact the Okaloosa County Health Department, Environmental Health at 850-833-9247 (Fort Walton Beach) or 850-689-7859 (Crestview).

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