

## News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Public Health Information safety precautions during and after Floods**

(Las Vegas, Nev., - August 20, 2003) – The Clark County Health District is providing information to deal with the health implications regarding safety and property during and after flash floods.

#### **Water Quality**

Residents who use private wells for their drinking water should be safe unless a large amount of erosion at the well head occurred, or the well head was under water for any period of time. If a change in the color or taste of the water is noted, or if the well head was covered by water, it should be boiled vigorously for 2-5 minutes to use for drinking and cooking. Additionally, the well should be sanitized.

Most wells in the valley are approximately 400 feet deep and are 8-5/8 inches diameter. Wells may be sanitized by contracting a water well professional or by pouring one gallon of household bleach into the well and turning the pump on and off two or three times to mix the bleach and water. Then faucets in the house should then be turned on until a bleach odor is detected. This should be done for each faucet in the house. Once this step is completed water must be left off for at least five hours. At the end of this time period the system should be flushed.

The system can be flushed by turning on the lawn irrigation system until no chlorine odor is detected. After this time faucets in the house can be flushed. Flushing in this manner will not damage a septic system.

To test for bacteria in the water contact:

1. Quest Diagnostics 733-7866
2. EFFEX Analytical 367-1187
3. NEL 657-1016

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These laboratories will provide bottles for testing and instructions on the sample collection. The cost varies from lab to lab.

## **Food Safety**

If the flood waters reach into the garage or home, or affect any food establishments, food safety can also be an issue. Again the CDC provides excellent guidelines as to what food is safe to keep and what food should be discarded.

Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with the flood water unless it is a hermetically sealed can that can be disinfected using a bleach solution of one cup of bleach in 5 gallons of water.

Anything with a twist off or crimped lid should be discarded. Do not keep any food or formula for use by infants regardless of packaging. Infants are at a much higher risk than the general public of contracting a disease carried by dirty water.

If the flooding results in a power outage, to protect frozen or refrigerated food, keep the doors to the equipment closed at all times, or seek an alternate location with power to store the food. Do not keep food that has been at room temperature for more than two hours. The best rule of thumb with refrigerated foods is "When in doubt, throw it out."

**Restaurants and other food establishments directly affected by flooding, including power loss, MUST NOT OPERATE during the crisis and must follow all guidelines outlined by the Clark County Health District before reopening.**

## **Clean up and Personal Hygiene**

Do not allow your children to play in the flood waters or with any of the rocks, mud, or debris generated by the flooding. While the water appears attractive to children raised in the desert, the water is full of filth, including raw sewage from failed lift stations, sewers, or septic systems, that can cause serious illness or injury to our children.

Ensure that if any family members do come into contact with the water or its contents, apply the following good personal hygiene practices:

Wash hands with soap and warm, clean water for at least 20 seconds before preparing or eating food, after toilet use, after participating in any flood cleanup activities, and after handling articles contaminated with flood water or sewage.

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Clean up should be performed as soon as possible. Walls, hard-surfaced floors, and many other household surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water and disinfected with a solution of 1 cup bleach to 5 gallons of water. Be particularly careful to thoroughly disinfect surfaces that may come in contact with food, such as counter tops, pantry shelves, refrigerators, etc. Areas where small children play should also be carefully cleaned. Wash all linens and clothing in hot water, or dry clean them. For items that cannot be washed or dry cleaned, such as mattresses and upholstered furniture, air dry them in the sun and then spray them thoroughly with a disinfectant. Steam clean all carpeting. If there has been a backflow of sewage into the house, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Remove and discard contaminated household materials that cannot be disinfected, such as wallcoverings, cloth, rugs, and drywall.

### **Other Hazards**

Other hazards must also be considered, especially during flash flooding, such as:

### **Swiftly Flowing Water**

If you enter swiftly flowing water, you risk drowning -- regardless of your ability to swim. Swiftly moving shallow water can be deadly, and even shallow standing water can be dangerous for small children. Cars or other vehicles do not provide adequate protection from flood waters. Cars can be swept away or may break down in moving water.

### **Animals**

Many wild animals may have been forced from their natural habitats by flooding, and many domestic animals are also without homes after the flood. Take care to avoid these animals, because some may carry rabies. Remember, most animals are disoriented and displaced, too. Do not corner an animal. If an animal must be removed, contact your local animal control authorities. The Clark County Health District can provide information about the types of wild animals that carry rabies in your area.

Rodents may be a problem during and after a flood. Take care to secure all food supplies, and remove any animal carcasses in the vicinity by contacting your local animal control authorities. If you are bitten by any animal, seek immediate medical attention. If you are bitten by a snake, first try to accurately identify the type of snake so that, if poisonous, the correct anti-venom may be administered.

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## **Chemical Hazards**

Use extreme caution when returning to your area after a flood. Be aware of potential chemical hazards you may encounter during flood recovery. Flood waters may have buried or moved hazardous chemical containers of solvents or other industrial chemicals from their normal storage places.

If any propane tanks (whether 20-lb. tanks from a gas grill or household propane tanks) are discovered, do not attempt to move them yourself. These represent a very real danger of fire or explosion, and if any are found, police or fire departments or your State Fire Marshal's office should be contacted immediately.

Car batteries, even those in flood water, may still contain an electrical charge and should be removed with extreme caution by using insulated gloves. Avoid coming in contact with any acid that may have spilled from a damaged car battery.

Flash floods can cause enormous damage in a short amount of time, yet recovering may take a long time. Take care of your family's and your personal health and safety during this stressful time.

Please contact the Clark County Health District with any specific questions not answered here. The CDC website also addresses many issues and is located at

[www.cdc.gov/nceh/emergency/flood/default.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/emergency/flood/default.htm)

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