

What sources should I use for information and advice?

An infodemic, with too much information including false or misleading information, can intensify during emergencies when people are unsure about what they need to do to protect themselves and those around them. To protect yourself from false information:



- get information, advice and guidance from official sources, such as your national and local health authority; and
- always check the source and analyse the content before sharing it with others.

World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe

UN City, Marmorvej 51,
DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark

Tel.: +45 45 33 70 00

Fax: +45 45 33 70 01

Email: eurocontact@who.int

Website: www.who.int/europe

Protecting your health before, during and after floods



What measures can I take to prepare for floods?

Getting prepared for floods is crucial for reducing health risks. Follow these steps to mitigate the potential health risks and consequences associated with floods.



- Follow local news and weather updates, or use mobile apps for real-time alerts as well as information from national and local authorities on the risks of flooding in your area.

- Stay informed about local evacuation plans, emergency assembly points and shelters in case of flooding.
- Prepare emergency and first aid kits. Pack essential items, including necessary medicines, medical records and first aid supplies in waterproof bags.
- Store extra food and water for your household in case of flooding.
- Store medical records and birth certificates in waterproof containers.
- Keep toxic substances on platforms above potential flood levels to prevent contamination.
- Notify local authorities about any additional support you or your family members, such as older adults or people with disabilities or limited mobility, might need in the event of a flood.

How can I avoid drowning or injury in floodwaters?

Floodwater can pose a drowning risk even if you know how to swim. It can contain things, such as sharp objects and downed power lines, that may harm health. The following actions can help you prevent or minimize the direct health consequences from flooding.



- After a flood, avoid walking or driving through flood water or entering unstable buildings or structures. There may be hidden hazards, such as holes or fast-flowing water.

- If you are stranded on something above the flood water, such as a tree or building, wait there for rescue and do not enter the water.
- Only try to rescue pets or farm animals if it is safe to do so.
- Only return home if you have been advised that it is safe to do so.

Always keep yourself informed by using official sources of information and follow guidance from your local authorities.

If you are advised to evacuate your home, take your essential portable belongings, such as health records and medicines you might need in the short term, in a waterproof bag. If requested not to evacuate, move to a safe location, recommended by the local authorities, with essential items.

How can I recognize hypothermia?

Staying in water under 20 °C for a long time can increase hypothermia risks. It happens when body temperature falls below 35 °C.



Signs of hypothermia are **shivering; pale, cold and dry skin – skin and lips may be blue; slurred speech; tiredness or confusion; and slow breathing.**

A baby with hypothermia may be:

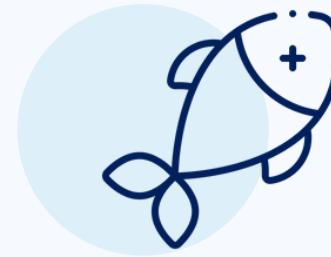
- flaccid
- cold to touch and their skin may be red
- unusually quiet and sleepy and may refuse to feed.

If you are around a person with hypothermia, administer first aid by:

- moving the person indoors or somewhere sheltered as quickly as possible, if it's safe to do so;
- removing any wet clothing, wrapping them in a blanket, sleeping bag or dry towel, and making sure their head is covered;
- giving them a warm non-alcoholic drink and, if they're fully awake, some sugary food, such as chocolate;
- keeping them awake until help arrives; and
- making sure you or someone else stays with them.

How do I deal with dead animals?

Animals that can't escape rising floodwaters may drown, get sick or die.



People should avoid touching or handling dead animals; instead, they should call the relevant local authorities to do so.

This includes not touching, collecting or eating dead fish.

If you are working to clean up areas containing animal carcasses:

- wear protective clothing and observe basic hygiene;
- keep hands clean to prevent infection with diseases that may be transmitted by farm animals;
- secure all food sources and remove animal carcasses to avoid attracting rats; and
- wear insect repellent when outdoors.

How can I protect myself from diseases spread by rodents, mosquitoes and snakes?

After a flood, there is a risk of getting ill with diseases transmitted by rodents, mosquitoes, as well as snake bites. If you or someone you know becomes ill, seek medical help.

Rodents can be displaced from their normal habitat, such as sewers, due to flooding and seek places where they can find food and shelter, such as in people's homes. Rats' droppings and urine can contaminate food and spread diseases. To prevent such risks:



- ensure that all entrances and windows are sealed to prevent the entry of rodents into the property;
- cover skin lesions with waterproof dressings;
- wear rubber boots, waterproof gloves, goggles and a face mask if you go into flood water, to avoid contamination from rodents or snake bites;
- keep your food in sealed containers, in a dry place out of the reach of rodents;
- do not leave pet food out in the open; and
- keep waste sealed in rubbish bins.

Floods may lead to more **mosquitoes**, which can carry disease.



- If your home is in an area with stagnant or standing water, use mosquito repellent, following the instructions on the label, and apply it to clothes or skin.

Snake bites can occur during floods. If a snake has bitten you, immediately seek medical help. If you are around someone who was bitten by a snake:



- seek medical help immediately;
- calmly talk to the person, explain to them what is happening and what you are doing to help them, because they might be very anxious;
- if you can, immobilize their body by putting them on their left side with their head tilted to the side and downwards and, especially, immobilize the bitten limb with a splint or sling; and
- do not touch, rub or massage, clean, or apply herbs or chemicals to the wound, as this may introduce infection, increase absorption of the venom and increase local bleeding.

How can I make sure my water is safe to drink?

Floodwater can potentially increase the transmission of waterborne diseases, such as cholera or hepatitis. To keep yourself and your family healthy, follow this guidance.



- If you can, boil water before you use it for drinking, brushing teeth, cleaning wounds and food preparation to prevent the risk of waterborne diseases.

After the water has reached a rolling boil, remove the pot or kettle from the heat and allow it to cool naturally. Do not add ice.

- Keep the hot water away from children to avoid scalding. Cool and store boiled water in a clean, covered container to avoid re-contamination.
- In case tap water or other local water sources are not available or safe, use bottled water if you can access it. Make sure that the bottled water you drink is properly sealed before you use it.
- Use tap water for other domestic purposes (e.g. cleaning) and personal hygiene (e.g. handwashing, showering), because it is safe to do so.
- Keep your hands clean. Handwashing with soap is important, especially before and during handling food and after going to the toilet. To be effective, wash your hands for 40–60 seconds with (unboiled) water and soap, or 20–30 seconds with alcohol-based hand rub, if available.

How can I make sure my food is safe to eat?

After a flood, there is a risk of illness from eating food that is contaminated. To keep yourself and your family healthy, do the following.



- Do not leave cooked food outside the refrigerator for more than two hours. Throw away perishable and cooked foods that have not been refrigerated properly.

- Plan when to eat different types of food. For example, eat perishable food first.
- Avoid eating food that shows signs of spoilage or has come in contact with contaminated water.

After four hours of a power cut, the following apply.

- Throw out all perishable foods in your fridge, such as meat, poultry, fish and leftovers.
- Do not leave cooked food outside the refrigerator for more than two hours.
- Never eat food to determine if it is safe. If in doubt, throw it away.
- In case you are unable to store, cook or reheat your food properly, keep a stock of pre-packaged, tinned or ready-to-eat food to eat, if possible.

Wash your hands with soap, especially before and during handling food and after going to the toilet.

When and how should I seek medical assistance?

Flooding has significant health effects, ranging from injuries to infectious diseases. Seek medical assistance if you:



- are injured or have a wound that can be contaminated;
- have been bitten by animals such as rats or snakes;
- have influenza-like symptoms, high fever,

strong headache, heavy cough, strong diarrhoea and/or vomiting, or heavy dizziness;

- have heart pain;
- have a chronic disease and need medication;
- have been exposed to chemicals or experience symptoms such as burning eyes, difficulty breathing or skin irritation; or
- feel stressed and aggressive, have recurrent dreams of flooding and are worried about returning floods.

If you need to access a hospital:

- check official information to find out which hospitals are functioning;
- remember – seriously injured and those with urgent needs are prioritized; and
- let health-care workers know if you have any chronic medical conditions.

What can I safely do when I return home?

Even if floodwaters may be down in some areas, many dangers can still exist. Do not return home until advised by local authorities. If you are advised that it is safe to return home, follow the guidance below.



- Never turn power on or off or use an electric appliance while standing in water.
- Have home gas and electrical appliances checked by qualified professionals before turning them on again.
- Do not use petrol or diesel generators indoors.
- Leave doors and windows open whenever possible and safe, to dry out your home.
- Wear a face mask, rubber boots, waterproof gloves and an apron while cleaning.
- Keep children away from flood-contaminated and muddy areas until a week after the water has receded.