



Rural health advice after a flood

TN: There are two logos at the top of the page. On the left is: Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa New Zealand Government. On the right is: Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand.

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Rural health advice after a flood

There are health risks with contaminated flood water, including from overflowing septic tanks. Assume that all flood water is contaminated e.g. this might be farm run-off with faecal matter from animals, sewage, farm chemicals, diesel/petrol from roads etc. Avoid contact with flood waters if possible.

General advice

- Always wash your hands with soap and water:
 - After handling items contaminated with flood water or sewage

- Before touching food, and before smoking
- After doing any clean-up activity
- Do not allow children or pets to play in flood waters. If children have been in flood waters, make sure they wash their hands well afterwards.
- Protect any cuts or wounds from flood waters. If any wounds develop or get red, swell or ooze see your doctor. Check with your family doctor as you may need a tetanus booster, especially if the wound is deep.
- Use protective clothing (i.e. rubber gloves, boots and eye protection) while cleaning.

Drinking water safety or using tank water

- Flush your water pipes, if on town supply, by turning the taps on and running until the water is clear. Follow any instructions from the council or your water supplier
- If you collect water from your roof make sure is clean e.g. no windblown debris. If there is, disconnect the tank at the downpipe and clean the roof (e.g. brush off debris and rinse if sufficient water available). Throw away water contaminated with debris, or boil or add bleach to water to make it safe to drink.
- If your water tank is affected by floodwater, get rid of the water (it may be polluted). Clean the tank out and disinfect it. We recommend you continue to boil your

water until you have used the first tank of water.

Alternatively you can add additional chlorine (unscented plain bleach) to your tank as per the instructions in

<http://www.esr.cri.nz/assets/WATER-CONTENT/ESR0940-Household-water-supply.pdf> (see page 23).

- If bore water is affected, pump the bore to waste for 24 hours. If the bore is under water, do not pump. Boil water before drinking until you can arrange for water quality tests at a later date.
- If your water comes from a shallow bore/well affected by floodwater or surface water run-off, mix 2.5 litres of plain, unscented household bleach with 45 litres of water and pour down the well. Replace the well cover and turn on each tap until there is a smell of chlorine in the water. Turn off the tap, but do not use the water for 8 hours. Then open all taps and flush out the chlorine.

Hazardous substances

Hazardous substances are harmful to health because they may be poisonous, corrosive, flammable, explosive, or an irritant. They can also cause contamination and damage if they are accidentally spilt in a disaster situation. You can recognise the most hazardous substances by the coloured diamond on the container. Get rid of contaminated carpets, flooring and upholstered furniture unless they can be cleaned and disinfected.

- **Do not** wade through floodwaters that could contain hazardous substances without wearing protective footwear and clothing.
- **Do not** rely on your sense of smell to assess danger. Be extra careful and get expert advice.
- **Do not** move explosives that have been wet. Contact Civil Defence.
- **Do not** go near or handle any drums or containers of chemicals you find without having protective clothing and equipment. Report them to the local authority.
- Wear rubber boots and rubber gloves during clean-up procedures so your skin is not exposed to any contamination.

Dead animal management

Decomposing animals can carry diseases that affect human and animal health.

They must be disposed of quickly to avoid contamination of waterways, or contact with remaining stock on your property.

Follow these principles of dead stock management:

- Dispose of the animal as soon as possible to reduce risk of disease spread.
- Utilise dead stock collection services if available.

- Do not leave dead stock on the roadside or within public view. Most collection services prefer to pick up inside the farm gate.
- The carcass must not be left within 45m of the farm dairy or within 50m of a water source
- Keep dead stock out of waterways.

Collection services are the preferred option. But if there is no collection service available, there are other disposal options to consider—see

<https://www.dairynz.co.nz/environment/on-farm-actions/waste-management/dead-stock-disposal/>

Getting rid of rubbish

- Listen for Civil Defence or local council instructions
- Sort perishable and non-perishable rubbish and flatten any bulky items.
- Bury rubbish away from any water course, such as a stream or river. Cover each layer with soil and add lime or disinfectant to reduce smells. Mark all sites.
- Compost all organic refuse if possible.
- Burn dry rubbish in the backyard using large drums, or build a makeshift incinerator from concrete blocks, bricks and wire mesh.
- Store rubbish that cannot be buried or burnt in covered containers or tightly tied plastic bags, ready for collection.

- Report any rubbish contaminated by hazardous substances to Civil Defence.
- Tell your insurance company about any condemned item of property before getting rid of it. If you are not insured, make a list of any items being dumped. Take photos if necessary to record what you are getting rid of.

Mental wellbeing and emotional support

- It can be a very difficult time for many people. For help with anxiety, distress, or mental wellbeing call or text "Need to Talk" on 1737 to speak to a trained counsellor for free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Or call Rural Support Trust on: 0800 787 254 to talk to someone who understands the pressures of rural life.
- Cultural support is also available for Māori and Pasifika at <https://www.wellbeingsupport.health.nz/>

For more information

Contact your Local Authority or the National Public Health Service.

End of Rural health advice after a flood