During a flood - Keep you and your family safe

There are several ways floodwater can enter your home and pose health or safety risks. The following information on staying safe during a flood will be useful to Ottawa residents in the event unwanted water enters your home. Protecting yourself during a flood and restoring your home after a flood can be a very stressful time. Ottawa Public Health suggests the following information to help you protect yourself and your family from illnesses associated with contaminated floodwaters.

Stay safe

During the spring thaw, rivers, streams and lakes swell with snowmelt and rainwater, making them very dangerous for people and pets. There is an increased risk of drowning and injury because of high water level, faster flow, cold temperature and debris in and below the water surface.

- Do not wait to evacuate. Move to higher ground as soon as you can.
- Stay away from edges of waterways, as the banks can be slippery.
- Do not walk or drive through floodwater even if it looks like it is shallow.
- Keep children away from floodwater.
- Stay within sight and arm’s reach of children when outdoors near water
- Keep pets on a leash. Do not try to rescue pets who are in cold water.

Be aware that there are many risks in and around flooded areas and that you will need to take precautions in order to protect your health.

Prevent Infections and Illnesses

Harmful bacteria, viruses, moulds and chemicals may be present in floodwater, even if they do not involve sewage backups. Always consider floodwater and surfaces that have been in contact with floodwater to be contaminated (not clean). Wear personal protective clothing and equipment when you encounter floodwater. This may include rubber boots, waterproof gloves, a facemask and eye protection (safety goggles).

- If you cut or puncture your skin, clean and disinfect the wound as soon as possible and then protect it by keeping it dry and clean. Seek medical attention if you have not had a tetanus shot in the past 10 years or if signs or symptoms of infection, such as redness, swelling or oozing develop.
- If you rely on a private well for drinking water, do not drink the water until you have determined if your well has been affected by floodwater and you have tested it for bacteriological safety. Use boiled or bottled water. Testing your well water should occur after the floodwaters have receded.
Toilets and septic systems are often impacted by floodwater. Only flush your toilets and drain water from your sinks if your septic system is not submerged in floodwater in order to prevent sewage backing up into your home.

Always wash your hands with soap and clean water or use an alcohol-based hand rub before preparing or eating food, after toilet use, after contact with floodwater, and after handling articles contaminated with floodwater. For more information on handwashing, visit the Ottawa Public Health handwashing web page - [http://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-services/ottawas-health-is-in-your-hands.aspx](http://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-services/ottawas-health-is-in-your-hands.aspx)

Safe drinking water – private well owners

If flood waters have reached the level of your well head, or covered your well head, your well water may be contaminated and not safe to drink.

Residents who own private wells affected by flooding are advised to:

- **Stop using your well water**, use another potable water source such as bottled water for ALL water use, including drinking, preparing food, cleaning, bathing, hand washing.
- If you want to continue to use your well water and do not suspect chemical contamination, bring the water to a rolling boil for at least one minute and let it cool before using it for drinking, making infant formula, juices, ice or recipes, brushing your teeth, rinsing contact lenses, and washing food or dishes. Refrigerate your boiled water until it is used.
- **Do not test** your well water during a flood.

Safe food donations


Prevent Injury and Loss of Life

Be aware of the following physical hazards during and after a flood:

**Drowning**

Standing and flowing waters present drowning risks associated with driving, walking or swimming through floodwater. During overland flooding, such as a river overflowing, it is important to leave a flood risk area before waters rise to prevent being trapped and risking drowning. If flooding is related to a rainfall event or plumbing issue, ensure people entering the area take precautions against drowning risks such as never enter a flooded area alone and wear a floatation device.
Electrocution

Electrocution is a safety risk when entering flood-damaged areas. Do not enter your basement, or other impacted areas of your home, if you know or suspect water has risen above the level of electrical outlets, baseboard heaters, and furnace, or is near your electrical panel. If you are unsure, have a licensed electrician check it out before you enter any areas with pooled water. Do not turn on any electrical appliance (major or small, furnace, water heater, etc.) if it has gotten wet. Have it checked by a qualified service technician to confirm it is safe to do so.

Power outages and risk of carbon monoxide poisoning

Do not use the following indoors or in garages during a power outage:

- charcoal or gas barbecues
- camping heating equipment
- home generators
- gasoline/diesel equipment (pumps, fans)

The use of these alternative sources can cause carbon monoxide (CO) to build up in your home. Make sure there is at least one working carbon monoxide detector installed at or near floor level.

Safety for children and people with disabilities

Ensure children are adequately supervised and keep them away from floodwater. Ensure people with disabilities are aware of the risks of floodwater and they have assistance getting to a safe and supervised place. When outdoors, always keep children within arm’s reach in and around water.

Slippery surfaces, poor lighting, heavy objects and exhaustion

Surfaces will be slippery and falls with injuries are likely. Poor lighting may increase risks of injury, especially if there are power outages or it is unsafe to turn on lights. Working when overtired can result in injuries. It is important to set a realistic schedule and take frequent rest and nutrition breaks. Objects are heavier when wet.

Hypothermia

Being exposed to cold water can increase the risk of hypothermia. Wear waterproof outerwear, a warm layer of clothing and an inner layer of clothing that wicks moisture away from your body. Be aware of the early signs of hypothermia (drowsiness, weakness and loss of coordination, confusion, shivering, and pale and cold skin).