



Revised 9/2021

After a flood, what the public should know about...

Personal health/Hand hygiene/Immunizations

How can you protect yourself against infectious diseases?

There are steps you can take to avoid injury and prevent infection while working in flood-affected areas. These include:

- Clean your hands as often as possible. Use soap and water if your hands are visibly soiled and rub your hands together for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if your hands are not visibly soiled.
- Take care of cuts or wounds immediately
 - Clean your hands thoroughly with soap and water before cleaning a wound
 - Clean the wound with soap and clean water
 - Pat the wound dry and apply a clean, dry dressing
 - See a healthcare provider for any dirty wounds or punctures
 - Contact your healthcare provider if you are bitten by an animal
- Wear protective clothing
 - Heavy, waterproof, cut-resistant work gloves
 - Safety goggles
 - Heavy, hard-soled boots
 - Long-sleeved shirt and long pants

What is the best way to prevent the spread of germs after a flood?

Keeping hands clean during an emergency helps prevent the spread of germs. If your tap water is not safe to use, wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected. Follow these steps to make sure you wash your hands properly:

- Wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold) and apply soap.
- Rub your hands together to make a lather and scrub them well; be sure to scrub the backs of your hands, between your fingers, and under your nails.
- Continue rubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice.
- Rinse your hands well under running water.
- Dry your hands using a clean towel or air dry them.
- A temporary handwashing station can be created by using a large water jug that contains clean water (for example, boiled or disinfected).

If I don't have running water, can I use hand sanitizer instead of washing my hands?

Washing hands with soap and water is the best way to reduce the number of germs on them. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers can quickly reduce the number of germs on hands in some situations, but sanitizers do not eliminate all types of germs. Hand sanitizers are not effective when hands are visibly dirty.

When should I wash my hands?

- Wash hands with soap and clean, running water (if available):
- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before eating food
- After using the toilet
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
- Before and after caring for someone who is sick
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After touching an animal or animal waste
- After touching garbage
- Before and after treating a cut or wound

Is it OK to flush my old/expired/unwanted/unused medications down the toilet to get rid of them?

Do not dispose of medication down the drain or toilet. Over-the-counter and prescription medications should not be disposed down the drain or by flushing them in the toilet. Properly disposing of unwanted and expired medications in the trash promotes a healthy aquatic environment and prevents accidental poisoning and intentional abuse. After a flood, septic systems are vulnerable and medications should not be flushed. To get rid of medications, follow these instructions:

- Mark out personal information
- Mix with water and coffee grinds, cat litter, or dirt
- Seal in opaque container or in a dark plastic bag
- Put in the trash

Are there any vaccination recommendations for residents?

As recovery efforts continue in the flooded areas of New Jersey, questions are being raised regarding the need for tetanus shots or other vaccinations. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), outbreaks of infectious disease after floods such as we experienced here in NJ are unusual, and there is generally no increased risk of getting vaccine preventable diseases. However, since each situation is unique, there may be the need to vaccinate particular individuals involved in clean-up efforts, medical care or living in communal settings.

Should I get a tetanus shot?

The same recommendations that apply at any other time also apply during a flood.

Everyone should be immunized with a primary series of tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis-containing vaccine. You should get a booster dose of tetanus-diphtheria toxoid (Td) if you have not had a booster dose within the last 10 years. Td boosters every 10 years are routinely recommended for all adults. The concern with flooding is that clean-up and repairs present an increased risk of injury and tetanus from such injuries is preventable by vaccination. Adults who did not receive DTP or DTaP as a child, or whose tetanus vaccination history is not known, should receive a primary series of three doses of adult Td.

People who have a wound should check with their healthcare provider promptly to see if they need to be vaccinated. An assessment of the wound and the person's immunization history will determine whether a vaccine is recommended. For puncture wounds, or wounds at risk for contamination (e.g., substances contaminated with feces, soil, or saliva) a tetanus shot is recommended if they haven't had one within the last five years. If they haven't had at least three previous tetanus shots at some point in the past, a dose of tetanus immune globulin is recommended. For people who sustain clean, minor wounds, a tetanus-containing shot is recommended if they haven't had one within the past 10 years.

Should I get a hepatitis shot?

There is no recommendation for mass vaccination with hepatitis A during flood events.. Evacuation itself is not a specific reason for hepatitis A vaccination unless exposure to hepatitis A virus is suspected.

There is no increased risk of hepatitis B during a flood unless unvaccinated volunteers or healthcare workers are involved in high-risk activities.

I don't have a doctor/health insurance, where can I get these vaccines?

Contact your local health department or the nearest Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC). To find your local health department, go to: <https://nj.gov/health/lh/documents/LocalHealthDirectory.pdf>. To find an FQHC, go to <https://www.njpca.org/>

For more information

- Your local health department: <https://nj.gov/health/lh/documents/LocalHealthDirectory.pdf>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/>
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): www.fema.gov
- New Jersey Dept. of Health, Communicable Disease Program Infectious and Zoonotic Program (handwashing): <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/izdp.shtml>
 - Vaccine Preventable Disease Program (immunizations): <https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/vpdp.shtml>
- New Jersey Dept. of Health, Consumer, Environmental and Occupational Health Service: <https://www.nj.gov/health/ceohs/>
- New Jersey Office of Emergency Management: readynj.gov