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Contaminated Waters Pose Health Risks



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FORT WALTON BEACH, Fla- Significant amounts of rain allows contaminants to enter surface water from a number of sources, including a sewage system. It also can cause sewage systems to spill into surface water when the system becomes overwhelmed. A health hazard exists when waters are contaminated with sewage bacteria and viruses. Therefore, avoid contact with flood waters and water bodies receiving large amounts of runoff from rain.

The Florida Department of Health in Okaloosa County (DOH-Okaloosa) recommends the following precautions to prevent possible illness from surface waters:

- Do not wade through standing and surface waters. If you do, wash your body with soap and clean water, and put on clean clothes.
- Avoid contact with flood waters, especially if you have open cuts or sores.
 - If you have any open cuts or sores and come in contact with flood waters, wash the area well with soap to prevent infection. If a wound develops redness, swelling, or drainage, seek immediate medical attention.
 - Residents who sustain lacerations and/or puncture wounds, and have not had a tetanus vaccination within the past five years will need a tetanus booster.
- Basic hygiene is critical. Wash your hands with soap and either disinfected or boiled and cooled water, especially before preparing or eating food, after toilet use, after changing a soiled diaper, after participating in flood cleanup activities and after handling articles contaminated with flood water or sewage.
 - The preferred method of treatment is boiling tap water since disinfection does not kill certain parasites, such as *Cryptosporidium*. Boiling water also kills harmful bacteria and viruses. The process is complete once the water is held at a rolling boil for at least one minute. Allow the water to cool before use.
 - When boiling is not an option, disinfect tap water by adding eight drops of regular unscented household bleach (four to six percent strength), which is about 1/8 teaspoon or a dime sized puddle, per gallon of water. If a higher strength bleach is used (8.25 percent strength), only add seven drops of bleach. Mix the solution and let it stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy after 30 minutes, repeat the procedure only one time.
- Avoid eating or drinking anything that has been contaminated with flood waters.

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