

MEDICAL INFORMATION – FLOODING

Below are excerpts from various web sources. For the complete text please review the original information at the website(s) listed.

FLOOD WATER HEALTH PRECAUTIONS (<http://www.epa.gov/Katrina/precautions.html>)

Every effort should be made to limit contact with flood water due to potentially elevated levels of contamination associated with raw sewage and other hazardous substances. EPA and the Department of Health and Human Services urge everyone in contact with flood waters to follow these guidelines:

- Wash your hands before drinking and eating
- Wash frequently using soap (disinfecting soap)
- Do not smoke
- Limit direct contact with contaminated flood water
- Report cuts or open wounds and limit exposure
- Report all symptoms
- Keep vaccinations current

The public and emergency response personnel should follow guidelines from federal, state and local health and safety professionals. Early symptoms from exposure to contaminated flood water may include upset stomach, intestinal problems, headache and other flu-like discomfort. Anyone experiencing these and any other problems should immediately seek medical attention. **Anyone with open-wounds or pre-existing conditions should seek immediate consultation to prevent possible illness.**

IMMUNIZATIONS (<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/after.asp#immunizations>)

Outbreaks of communicable diseases after floods are unusual. However, the rates of diseases that were present before a flood may increase because of decreased sanitation or overcrowding among displaced persons. Increases in infectious diseases that were not present in the community before the flood are not usually a problem. If you receive a puncture wound or a wound contaminated with feces, soil, or saliva, have a doctor or health department determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary based on individual records. **Specific recommendations for vaccinations should be made on a case-by-case basis, or as determined by local and state health departments.**

WORKER SAFETY AND HEALTH (<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/emergencypreparedness/guides/floods.html>)

Some of the hazards associated with working in flooded and recently flooded areas include: Electrical hazards, Carbon monoxide, Musculoskeletal hazards, Thermal stresses, Heavy equipment operation, Structural instability, Hazardous materials, Fire, Drowning, Hypothermia due to the cold weather and water exposure, Falls from heights, Burns from fires caused by energized line contact or equipment failure, Exhaustion from working extended shifts, Dehydration and Biohazards.

WHAT MUSCULOSKELETAL HAZARDS CAN I ANTICIPATE AFTER A FLOOD?

Workers involved in flood preparation and cleanup activities are at risk of back, knee, and shoulder injuries from manual lifting and handling of building materials, sandbags, and fallen tree limbs. To help prevent injuries, use proper lifting techniques and teams of two or more to move bulky and heavy items.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO AVOID DROWNING?

Anytime workers are exposed to moving water, their chances for accidental drowning increase. Even good swimmers are easily overcome by swift moving water. Workers should not work alone, and should wear a Coast Guard-approved personal protection device when working in or near water.

WHAT IS HYPOTHERMIA?

Hypothermia is a condition brought on when the body temperature drops to less than 95°F. Standing or working in water that is cooler than 75°F will remove body heat more rapidly than it can be replaced, resulting in hypothermia. Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness, and exhaustion. For more information see Princeton University's [Outdoor Action Guide to Hypothermia And Cold Weather Injuries](#).

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO AVOID HYPOTHERMIA?

Recognize the environmental and workplace conditions that lead to potential cold-induced illnesses and injuries. Select proper clothing for cold, wet, and windy conditions. This includes layering clothing to adjust to changing environmental temperatures, providing dry clothing, and wearing a hat and gloves, in addition to underwear that will keep water away from the skin (polypropylene). Take frequent short breaks in warm dry shelters to allow the body to warm up. Perform work during the warmest part of the day. Avoid exhaustion or fatigue because energy is needed to keep muscles warm. Use the buddy system (work in pairs). Drink warm, sweet beverages (sugar water, sports-type drinks). Avoid drinks with caffeine (coffee, tea, or hot chocolate) or alcohol. Eat warm, high-calorie foods like hot pasta dishes.

WHY SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT EXHAUSTION DURING A FLOOD RESPONSE?

Workers involved in response operations are often called upon to work extended hours under stressful conditions. This working environment increases the risk of injury due to inattentiveness and also makes workers more vulnerable to stress-induced illness and disease.