
FACT SHEET

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Ministry of Health

FLOOD PREPAREDNESS – PUBLIC HEALTH

The Ministry of Health has been working with other government agencies to ensure the highest possible level of readiness in the event of flooding in various areas of the province.

- All health sector organizations located in high risk areas are actively engaged in planning and preparations. The Ministry of Health and all regional health authorities are working closely with the Provincial Emergency Program and other agencies.
- BC Ambulance has pre-positioned units and equipment in advance of potential flooding.
- The BC Centre for Disease Control is prepared to provide enhanced surveillance for possible outbreaks (such as gastrointestinal illness) and BCCDC/PHSA laboratories will support an increase in water testing. Other laboratory services are available as needed to respond to potential hazards.

What British Columbians can do to prepare for flooding from a public health perspective:

- As part of your personal emergency kit, make sure you have enough prescription medications or other critical medical supplies on hand for at least 72 hours.
- Since water supplies can be affected by flooding, ensure you have enough water on hand to provide for at least 72 hours. Listen for boil water advisories on your local news.
- In addition to basic personal preparedness information provided by the Provincial Emergency Program, the Ministry of Health is encouraging home and business owners with well and septic systems threatened by flooding to take the following steps to reduce the risk to their systems.

People who own properties with well systems or draw water from surface sources:

- **Before:** In advance of any flooding, have the cap on drilled wells inspected to ensure seals are not cracked, damaged or missing. The seal cap prevents vermin and contaminants from making contact with drinking water, and provides access for pump wiring. Use of a qualified professional for this inspection and any repairs is recommended. At the very least, sandbag around the well-head to prevent water from entering. Surface and shallow well water sources can quickly be affected by flood conditions. Dug wells that become flooded will need to be disinfected and tested to ensure water is safe to drink. Information on disinfection is available through the [BC HealthFiles](#).
- **During and after:** Watch for any change in water taste, odour or colour. Surface water users in vulnerable areas are likely to be quickly affected by flood conditions, with increased turbidity (cloudiness from sediments.)

- If you suspect your well has been flooded, experience changes in water conditions, or hear nearby community systems have initiated boil water advisories, [have your water tested](#) before using for any domestic purposes such as drinking, washing foods or cooking.
- Flooding can also introduce sediments that can damage pump systems. Ensure pump inlets in shallow wells, lakes or streams are clear of any debris before starting.
- For further information on wells and water testing, contact your [local drinking water officer](#) through your local health authority or public health office.

People who own properties with septic systems:

- **Before:** In advance of any flooding, you may want to have your tank pumped to reduce any possible back-up of sewage into your residence. But, if you have had your septic tank pumped and flooding of the tank area is possible, ensure the tank has been refilled to prevent flood waters from floating the tank out of the ground.
- **During :** Septic systems can be affected by flood waters as the water table rises. You can minimize the impact by reducing the amount of water handled by your system. Should flooding of your septic field and tank area occur, there is very little that can be done. You should discontinue use of your system, and do not empty your septic tank
- **After:** If sewage has backed up into the basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor with a chlorine solution of one-half cup of chlorine bleach to 1 gallon of water. Do not use the sewage system until water in the disposal field and around the house has receded. If you suspect damage to your septic system, have it professionally inspected and serviced.

Other Steps you can take:

- Flooding can introduce a number of health hazards into your home, including sewage back-up through floor drains and basement sinks. If your home is at risk from flooding, consider blocking these drains, and remove as much materials from basements as possible as part of your preparations.
- Wet carpets, insulation and wallboard can quickly become home to moulds which can affect health, especially to people with respiratory problems. Some moulds are known allergens, and can irritate eyes, cause skin infections and rashes. It is important that affected items are removed as quickly as possible after flooding.

Assistance: For drinking water and sewage questions, contact the drinking water officer in your health authority for more information.