



News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Health Department Urges Personal Hygiene during Flood Clean-Up

Benton Harbor, MI – Cleanup efforts from the recent heavy flooding continue all around Berrien County. The Berrien County Health Department has several recommendations for anyone cleaning up their home or volunteering on a flood clean up team. “It’s important to stress that every effort should be made to limit contact with flood water due to potentially elevated levels of contaminants,” says Nicki Britten, health officer for the Berrien County Health Department.

But with families returning to their homes and volunteers helping to get our communities cleaned up, having contact with some flood water is unavoidable. Floodwaters likely have contaminants, like sewage, mold, and other organisms that can make you and your family sick. “Basic hygiene is very important anytime you have contact with floodwater. Always wash your hands with soap and water after helping in cleanup activities and after handling items contaminated by floodwater or sewage,” Britten adds.

The most common flood-related illnesses are gastrointestinal infections that cause stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and sometimes fever and are caused when contaminants in the floodwater get into your mouth, often times from contact with dirty hands. Even though there is some risk of disease transmission during contact with flood water and sewage, that risk is relatively small. If you have had contact with floodwater and are experiencing gastrointestinal infection symptoms, it is recommended you contact your doctor immediately.

Anyone who is exposed to flood water should frequently wash their hands with soap and clean water, keep pre-existing skin wounds dry and clean, and make sure kids do not play in flood water or with toys that have been in flood water. Wear personal protective equipment, including rubber boots, rubber gloves, a face mask, and goggles during cleanup of affected areas. Being up to date on your vaccinations, like tetanus, is also an important way to lower the risk of getting sick during or after a flood.

The Berrien County Health Department performs routine syndromic surveillance to assess disease trends in the community; to date, there have not been any increases in flood-related illnesses in Berrien County. For more information on health and safety considerations after flooding, visit the Berrien County Health Department’s webpage at: www.bchdmi.org.

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