



Commonwealth of Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: **Barbara Fox**
502-564-6786, ext. 3102

Julianne Hatton
502-564-6786, ext.3104

Public Health Issues Guidelines Related to Severe Flooding

Flooding Can Create Health, Safety Concerns

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Feb. 13, 2020) - The Department for Public Health (DPH), within the Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS), reminds Kentuckians to follow safety guidelines following severe flooding and water run-off events from recent rainfall across the state.

Governor Andy Beshear, who today visited the Eastern Kentucky areas hardest hit by flood, praised residents for helping each other and told them his administration will support them.

“We will use every resource available to us to ensure Kentuckians affected by these devastating floods can have a safe and expedient recovery,” Gov. Beshear said. “As neighbors have been selflessly helping neighbors, our state agencies stand ready to protect and assist those who are in need.”

DPH officials have specific flood recovery measures.

“We urge Kentuckians to use caution in flooded areas, and once floodwaters recede and the clean-up begins, to keep yourself and your family safe,” said Rebecca Gillis, director of the DPH Division of Public Health Protection and Safety. “Taking the time to follow safety guidelines related to food safety, mold removal and other issues helps prevent unnecessary injury and illness.”

The following precautions are recommended by DPH:

Flood Waters

- During flood cleanup, the risk of incurring wounds may be increased. For this reason, cleanup workers should be sure that they are up-to-date with tetanus vaccination, ideally before starting cleanup activities. Adults need a tetanus booster shot every 10 years. Td or Tdap can be used; getting the Tdap instead of Td for one tetanus booster during adulthood is recommended to maintain protection against pertussis. Being up-to-date for tetanus vaccine can greatly simplify the treatment for any wound that might occur. Contact your regular health care provider or your local health department if you believe you may need a tetanus shot.
- Flood-related drowning is also a danger, and often occurs when people become trapped by rising flood waters or when they voluntarily enter flooded areas. Never enter flood waters unless you are escaping immediate danger. Do not attempt to drive a vehicle through flood waters. Carefully monitor the weather conditions and water levels to avoid becoming surrounded by water.
- Floods can damage utilities, leading to downed power lines and a risk of electrocution. Stay clear of damaged power lines. Natural gas and propane systems can produce dangerous gas leaks. If you smell gas, open doors and windows and evacuate the area.

Home Clean-up and Mold Removal

- Use caution during clean-up activities. Wear proper safety equipment, such as work gloves, boots, helmets, eye and ear protection, and chainsaw chaps when operating power tools or machinery. Ensure all electrical tools are properly

grounded and use ground fault interrupters (GFI) if available. Never use electrically powered tools in or near standing water.

- Homeowners whose homes sustained water damage are urged to follow recommendations to limit mold growth. Mold fungi can be found indoors and outside and can accumulate in homes affected by flood/water damage. Mold grows best in warm, damp and humid conditions.
- Signs of mold include discolored walls possibly showing water damage, or green or black spots apparent on walls. Mold also has a musty, earthy smell or a foul stench. Allergy sufferers tend to be most affected by mold exposure.
- If mold is growing in your home, you will need to clean up the mold and fix the moisture problem. Mold growth can be removed from hard surfaces with commercial products, soap and water, or a bleach solution of no more than 1 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water. Severe mold cases may require an expert to clean up.
- DPH recommends that doors and windows be open while cleaning affected areas. Use protective glasses or goggles, rubber boots and waterproof gloves and wash clothing afterwards. If there is heavy mold growth, use a respirator or suitable mask to prevent breathing the mold. Remove all wet items that have been wet for more than 48 hours and cannot be cleaned and dried.

Food Safety

- DPH also cautions people to think about food safety if they have been affected by power outages. This includes keeping freezers closed to maintain the proper temperature for frozen foods. A freezer will hold its appropriate temperature for approximately 48 hours when full and for 24 hours when half full. If you have power outages, it is best to keep freezers closed to help keep frozen food from going bad.
- Refrigerated foods should be safe as long as power is out for no more than four hours. Throw away any perishable food in your refrigerator, such as meat, poultry, lunchmeats, fish, dairy products, eggs and any prepared or cooked foods that have been above 40 degrees Fahrenheit for two hours.

For more information about public health issues related to flooding, visit

<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/index.html> or

<https://healthalerts.ky.gov/Pages/FloodSafety.aspx>.

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The Cabinet for Health and Family Services is home to most of the state's human services and healthcare programs, including the Department for Medicaid Services, the Department for Community Based Services the Department for Public Health, the Department for Aging and Independent Living and the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities. CHFS is one of the largest agencies in state government, with nearly 8,000 full- and part-time employees located across the Commonwealth focused on improving the lives and health of Kentuckians.