

Snohomish County Health Department advises you to follow proper health and safety precautions when returning home or cleaning up after a flood. This guide provides tips and resources for:

- **water sanitation**
- **disinfection of a well**
- **food contamination**
- **sewage and garbage disposal**
- **electrical safety**
- **household effects**
- **building clean up**
- **important resources**

Returning Home After a Flood

Returning home in daylight is best. If you have to get there in the dark, use battery-powered flashlights (not candles or gas lanterns), and make sure to shut off all electrical power and natural gas or propane tanks. Notify the gas company or the police/fire departments immediately if you smell gas or suspect a gas leak.



Ensure that you have access to a safe drinking water supply. Flood waters might be contaminated and can make you sick if you drink it. If you are on a public water supply, check with your local water district for current conditions. If you are on a well or private water system, please read “Disinfection of a Well” on page 2.

Parents and caregivers, do not allow children to play in flood waters or with toys the flood water touched. Disinfect contaminated toys with a solution of 1 cup of bleach mixed with 5 gallons of water. Wash children’s hands frequently, and always before meals.

Limit direct exposure to contaminated flood waters and prevent infections. If you have any open sores or wounds, clean them as soon as possible by washing with soap and clean water. Seek medical attention if necessary.

Water Sanitation

Drinking water – Do not use water from a private water system that's been flooded. Use only boiled or treated water. Bring the water to a full rolling boil for 1 minute before using. Water for brushing teeth, washing dishes or foods, requires the same treatment as drinking water.

1. If you need large quantities of water, or if boiling is inconvenient because of fuel failures, use ordinary liquid household chlorine bleach to treat the water. Add 1/2 teaspoon to each 5 gallons of water, or 8 to 10 drops to a gallon of water. Double the amount of bleach for cloudy or colored water. Allow the mixture to stand for 30 minutes before using.
2. Once flood waters recede and power returns, the well will need to be disinfected.

NOTE: If you are on a public water supply and your area has flooded, check with your local water district or company about current conditions. Boil your water for 1 minute if you see any indications of problems with water quality.

Group A Water System Information:

<https://doh.wa.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/Documents/Pubs/331-084.pdf>

Group B Water System Information:

<https://doh.wa.gov/community-and-environment/drinking-water/water-system-assistance/group-b/emergencies>

Disinfection of a Well

1. Remove any debris that may have entered the well during flooding. Run the water until it becomes clear.
2. Roughly calculate the volume of water in the well. To do this, multiply the number of cubic feet of water by 7 1/2 to determine the number of gallons. (NOTE: For a 36-inch diameter casing, each foot of water equals about 50 gallons. For a 6-inch diameter casing, each foot of water equals about 2 gallons.)
3. Use liquid chlorine bleach (5 1/4 – 6 1/2% chlorine) in an amount equivalent to 1 gallon for each 1,000 gallons of water in the well. Do not use bleach with additives such as “fresh scent.”
4. Pour the required quantity of bleach into the well. Connect a garden hose to the nearest outside faucet and circulate the water through the hose and back into the well. This will mix the chlorine with the water and the pump will draw the chlorine to the bottom of the well. After you start smelling the chlorine in the water coming out of the hose, work the hose around to rinse the upper portion of the well with the disinfectant. (NOTE: If you cannot reach the well with a hose, you can rinse the upper portion of the casing by pouring chlorinated water down the inside of the case using a bucket. Mix 1 cup chlorine bleach per bucket of water.)
5. Draw water at every water outlet connected to the system until you smell a strong chlorine odor.
6. Allow the disinfectant to remain in the system overnight (24 hours is best).
7. Use one or more outside faucets to draw water out of the well to remove the chlorine. Flush the well thoroughly and repeatedly to remove the chlorine. Also flush all of the water lines.

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8. After following this procedure and rendering the water completely free of disinfectant, you should wait a minimum of 7 days following disinfection of a drilled well prior to checking it for bacteria by sampling. Wait a minimum of 14 days following disinfection of a dug well before resampling. The bacteriological analysis will tell you if the underground source of water is safe to drink.

You can get water sample bottles and turn them in at the following locations:

- American Printers/Edge Analytical, 16821 Smokey Point Blvd, Arlington WA, 98223
- Brown's Plumbing, 1717 Grove Street, Marysville WA, 98270
- Consolidated Supply Co., 3413 B California Street, Everett WA 98201
- **Pick up location only:** Renew Medical, 190 W. Dayton Street, Suite 204, Edmonds WA, 98020
- **Pick up location only:** Snohomish County Health Department, Environmental Health Section, Room 104, located in the Rucker Building, 3020 Rucker Avenue, Everett WA, 98201

There is a sample analysis fee to test the water for coliform bacteria payable when you bring in the water sample. The cost may vary.

Food Contamination

1. Destroy foods, medicines, and cosmetics in cardboard containers or other packages that are not hermetically sealed, and which have been in contact with flood waters. This includes flour, cereal and other commodities in bags or packages. Cans should be rinsed in a diluted bleach solution before opening.
2. Discard fresh fruit and vegetables which have been contaminated.
3. Use only commercially pasteurized or canned milk that has not touched flood waters.
4. If the refrigeration is off for more than 4 hours, some foods may become unsafe for consumption. Contact us for advice, 425.339.5250.
5. If the power is off, you can use dry ice from the nearest source (such as dairies) to preserve food for many hours.
6. When in doubt about the safety of any food or drug product, throw it out.

Sewage and Garbage Disposal

1. Check your septic tank and pump it out after flood waters recede. You may need to replace your septic system if it is severely damaged or corroded.
2. If you use a temporary pit privy, put lime in the pit frequently to keep down odors and flies, and again when you abandon the pit.
3. Garbage should be taken to a county drop-box or transfer station for proper disposal.

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For additional resources regarding monitoring and maintenance of septic systems, please visit

- www.SavvySeptic.org
- <https://www.snohd.org/687/Find-a-Septic-Contractor>

Electrical Safety

Wet or flooded fixtures and wires present a serious threat of fire or electrocution. To reduce the danger of electrical shock or fire, do not attempt to use electricity until it is thoroughly checked by a qualified professional.

Household Items

1. Use soap and water to thoroughly scrub all your household belongings made of wood, metal or of other hard substances, including glass and chinaware. Allow them to dry.
2. Thoroughly launder or dry clean clothing, bedding and other effects made of soft materials. Mattresses and stuffed furniture cannot be adequately cleaned, even with steam. Discard them.
3. Dry wet-washed items for 10 hours in direct sunshine when possible.
4. Wash your hands in soap and water immediately after handling objects you have recovered from the flood areas. Keep your hands away from your mouth while cleaning or otherwise handling these objects.

Home/Structure Clean-up

1. Clear out trash and mud and remove from building. Arrange for a dumpster with your refuse collection company.
2. Flush with clean water with a hose under pressure, if possible. Do not use river water.
3. Scrub floors and walls and all other surfaces which people are likely to touch. Do this with soap and hot water. Rinse thoroughly with clean water. Drain off water.
4. After scrubbing flooded surfaces, use a disinfectant solution (1 ounce of household bleach to 4 gallons of water). Never use bleach in a closed space. Open doors and windows first. Put on personal protective equipment to protect your eyes, nose, mouth, and skin. Wear goggles, an N-95 respirator, and protective gloves.
5. Open all doors and windows and allow the entire building and everything in it to dry thoroughly. Do not reoccupy the building for at least 10 hours after it's dry.
6. Check flues, chimneys, wiring and plumbing.
7. Check for weakened foundations, warped doors and windows. Leave your home or other building if you hear any shifting or strange noises—this could mean it's about to fall.
8. Flood waters may carry a variety of germs and contaminants. Wash your hands frequently with soap and disinfected water to prevent the spread of disease. Wear gloves and boots at all times.

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9. If sewage has overflowed within the residence, refer to the Snohomish County Health Department's "Guidelines for Cleaning Indoor Sewage Spills" for clean up procedures.
 10. Never use generators or other gasoline, propane, natural gas, or charcoal-burning devices inside your home—or even outside near an open window, door, or vent. Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that can build up indoors and poison the people and animals inside, leading to sudden illness and death.

Mold

If you see or smell mold, it's time to clean up. Be prepared to address it quickly to prevent additional problems or health risks. For information, visit <https://www.snohd.org/216/Mold-Air-Quality>

Other Resources

For more information regarding flood hazards and assistance, contact the following agencies:

Snohomish County Department of Emergency Management

<http://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/180/Emergency-Management>

720 – 80th St SW – Bldg A, Everett 98203

425.388.5060

Flood Information – 24-hr recording

- Skykomish, Snohomish, Snoqualmie: 425.388.3653
- Stillaguamish: 425.388.3702

American Red Cross

<https://www.redcross.org/local/washington/about-us/locations/northwest-washington.html>

Snohomish County Chapter, 2530 Lombard Avenue, Everett 98201

Phone: 425.252.4103