

Media Release



Health
Northern NSW
Local Health District

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HEALTH ADVICE: AVOID CONTAMINATED FLOODWATER

The North Coast Public Health Unit is urging Northern Rivers residents and visitors to avoid unnecessary contact with floodwater.

Greg Bell, Acting Director Public Health, said it is important that people treat all floodwater as potentially contaminated. Mr Bell advised people that they should not swim or play in floodwater because of the dangers of contacting diluted sewage, bacteria, chemicals and physical hazards that may be present.

“While the risk of infection from contact with floodwater is generally low, it is important to stay away from flood-affected areas and avoid unnecessary contact with mud and floodwaters.”

Some safety and hygiene tips to remember:

- when coming into contact with floodwater or items contaminated by floodwater people should ensure that feet are covered and always wear gloves
- always wash hands thoroughly with soap or alcohol-based hand cleanser
- cover cuts and abrasions; and
- if you cut yourself on something that has been contaminated with floodwater, check with your GP about your tetanus vaccination.

“To avoid illness, it is important to wash hands with soap and clean water after participating in any flood clean-up activities, and before eating or handling food.

“Swimming in contaminated water may cause illness, including ear infections, eye infections, fever and diarrhoea” said Mr Bell.

Residents and visitors are advised to avoid swimming in the ocean, rivers, creeks and lagoons for at least three days after the rain has stopped and to also avoid swimming if there are signs of pollution such as discoloured water, oil or scum on the water, and litter or other debris floating in the water or on the tide line.

Mr Bell said that if people have health concerns they should first seek advice from their General Practitioner.

For more information please visit the following link on the NSW Health website:
http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/emergency_preparedness/weather/Pages/storms-and-floods.aspx

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Hints for staying healthy during floods and while cleaning up:

- Wear gloves and suitable foot wear when removing mud or debris from homes or yards.
- Yards can be raked to remove debris and if necessary, hosed down.
- Don't try to check electrical appliances and other equipment yourself, seek professional help.
- Discard any tinned food that has no labels, as well as perishable food that has been out of refrigeration for more than 4hours. If freezer door is kept shut, frozen food will not spoil for at least 24 hours.
- Have septic tanks or pipes professionally inspected or serviced if you suspect damage.
- Avoid being bitten by mosquitoes, use roll-on insect repellent on exposed skin and apply every few hours.
- Avoid creating mosquito breeding sites in your yard by emptying out pot plant bases and removing all water-holding rubbish.
- When cleaning up, consider your personal health, drink plenty of clear fluids, do not wait until you are thirsty. Take breaks when you can, watch out for heat stress.

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