

Stay safe and healthy after storms, floods and cyclones

Following the initial damage to property and infrastructure caused by storms, floods and cyclones, sickness and injury can still occur.

Water can become contaminated from the breakdown in amenities, such as power, sewerage and water supply. This can increase the risk of disease during clean up and recovery operations.

The main health risks in natural disaster areas include:

- injury—such as, falls, skin lacerations and exposure to fallen electricity wires
- carbon monoxide poisoning from using petrol powered generators and pumps in confined spaces
- skin infections—which, if not treated, can develop into blood infection
- snake and spider bites
- sunburn
- mosquito-borne infections
- illness from eating or drinking contaminated foods or liquids.

Follow these safety tips to stay safe and healthy during the clean-up and recovery.



Photograph by Michael Marston

Preparing to clean up

Before starting to clean up around your home or business ensure: the storm, flood or cyclone is over; it is safe to go outside; and any waters have receded.

Ensure you have a properly stocked first aid kit on site and:

- keep yourself safe by always wearing protective clothing—such as sturdy, closed-toe shoes, loose long-sleeved shirts and trousers, thick gloves, hat and sunglasses.
- consider using a walking pole or similar to guide you safely around—such as a piece of smooth timber (e.g. broom handle or a piece of tree branch). Muddy surfaces can be extremely slippery resulting in falls that can cause fractures and other injuries.
- clean any cuts and cover with a water resistant dressing.

Using petrol powered generators or pumps

Carbon monoxide poisoning is a real risk for people in the vicinity of a petrol powered generator or pump if these are used in an enclosed area.

Make sure generators and pumps are situated in well ventilated areas preferably outside.

Working safely onsite

When working onsite, it is crucial that you maintain good personal hygiene.

Don't walk or wade through flood water, if you can avoid it

- There is an increased risk of wound infections, diarrhoea, conjunctivitis, and ear, nose and throat infections from polluted waters. Leptospirosis can also be contracted from flood water.
- Young children, the elderly, pregnant women, people with chronic diseases—such as diabetes and kidney disease—and people who abuse alcohol or other drugs are more prone to infections and should consider avoiding flood water and mud.

Wash your hands and keep wounds covered

Wash your hands with soap and water or a hand sanitiser after:

- contact with damaged materials, flood water or mud

- going to the toilet
- before preparing or consuming food or drink.

Protect your skin from cuts that could become infected

- Clean and disinfect all wounds and keep them covered. Avoid flood water and mud if you have broken skin or wounds, especially if you have diabetes or other chronic diseases. Wounds heal most quickly if the limbs are rested and elevated.
- See a health professional or your doctor early for severe wounds, especially if the wound is dirty or becomes red, sore, swollen or painful.

Watch out for snakes, spiders and mossies

- Watch out for snakes and spiders that may have hidden inside houses or debris.
- If bitten by a spider or snake apply immediate first aid and seek medical attention
- Sandflies and mosquitoes may become a real nuisance following storms, floods and other natural disasters. Wear long sleeves and long pants and apply personal insect repellent.

Be careful of contaminated water and food

- Your local council will alert you if the local water supply is contaminated. If in doubt, boil water and cool before drinking.
- Some food after an event may not be safe to eat, especially if power has been cut or if food has been in contact with contaminated floodwater. Contaminated food or perishable foods that have not been refrigerated should be discarded.

Waste

- Contact your local council regarding waste disposal. Take all necessary precautions for handling asbestos, cement and/or debris.



Photograph by Hugh O'Brien

Further information:

- Contact your local council office
- Department of Health
www.health.qld.gov.au/disaster
- 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84)
- Contact your nearest Public Health Unit.

For general information, contact your local Public Health Unit.

Metro South Tel: 3176 4000
 Bundaberg Tel: 4303 7500
 Cairns Tel: 4226 5555
 Darling Downs Tel: 4699 8240
 Gold Coast Tel: 5687 9000

Hervey Bay Tel: 4184 1800
 Mackay Tel: 4885 5800
 Metro North
 Brisbane Office Tel: 3624 1111
 Moreton Bay Tel: 3624 1111

Rockhampton Tel: 4920 6989
 Sunshine Coast Tel: 5409 6600
 Toowoomba Tel: 4699 8240
 Townsville Tel: 44336900
 West Moreton Tel: 3818 4700