Floods and your Health

The recent flooding events have impacted many areas and flooded homes, businesses and farms, as well as cutting off access to some areas leading to people being isolated. The floodwater can make it harder to stay healthy and safe, but there is help, further information and advice available. You can stay safe, healthy and well in these situations, helping you to recover faster and minimise the impacts on your lifestyle and work by being aware.

Stay up to date on information

Floods are expected to continue to affect our region over the coming days with more rain predicted. It is important to know what the latest advice is so you and your family can stay safe. Advice changes quickly and regularly as things happen and new information becomes available, so it's a good idea to check regularly for the most up-to-date and accurate information.

Check the VicEmergency website (emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/) for the latest information and advice for your area, or go to the following sources:

- Bureau of Meteorology website or app: www.bom.gov.au/vic/warnings/
- Your local council's website, Facebook or social media pages
- SES website: www.ses.vic.gov.au/

Call the Flood Recovery Hotline on 1800 560 760 if you require help or assistance with:

- navigating available supports;
- clean-up;
- temporary accommodation; or
- mental health and wellbeing support.

The recovery hotline is open from 7:30am to 7:30pm every day.

Beware of bacteria

Contact with floodwater with your bare skin can make you sick or cause infections, as it contains bacteria that causes disease. These bacteria can come from sewage or animal waste mixing with the water as the area floods.

Rising water levels can make sewage overflow inside your home, as well as being present in floodwater, so contaminated areas need to be cleaned and disinfected when possible. Always keep pets and children away from the area and out of floodwater.

Leptospirosis outbreaks may also occur following heavy rain or floods. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach pain, coughing and a sore throat. See your doctor or GP as soon as you can if you are experiencing this. For more information, go to: www.healthdirect.gov.au/leptospirosis.

Be mindful of mould

Mould is a common fungus (an organism related to mushrooms) that can grow in wet or moist areas that lack fresh air, like ceilings, bathrooms, carpets and wood. It can look like fuzz, or a stain or discolouration and can be many different colours. It is also common after flooding or if an area can't dry properly.

Mould growing in your home can damage your health. It can cause blocked noses, sneezing, coughing, wheezing and respiratory infections; it can also make asthma and other allergies worse. People who are most likely to be affected or become sick are under 12 years old, infants or very young children, pregnant women, over 65 and those with weak immune systems and those with existing allergies, severe asthma or lung diseases.

For more information, as well as what to do if you find mould and how to get rid of it, search for mould on the Better Health Channel website.

Brought to you by the GV Public Health Unit

Power outages & medications

Flooding can cause problems with power and gas supplies, including reduced supply or complete outages. In these situations, taking care of your health needs to be your priority. During any long power outages, if you rely on medications that can be affected by temperature or need to be stored in a certain way, it is important you make sure your medication is safe and remains effective.

Some medicines, like insulin, normally need to be kept in the fridge but can be stored at room temperature (25 degrees Celsius) for a specified number of days. Some medicines need to be refrigerated between +2°C and +8°C or they may not be as effective.

If the power has been off for a long time and you are worried about the quality of your medicines, you should throw them out, unless you need them for your immediate health.

If you have questions about how a medicine should be stored, contact your pharmacist or doctor; you can also contact Health Direct on 1800 022 222 for advice.

Personal wellbeing in emergencies

In emergencies, like in the recent floods, it is normal to experience many types of physical, mental, emotional and behavioural reactions. Make sure you look after yourself and reach out to friends, family or neighbours so you can talk to and support each other. It can be helpful to know friends or family are thinking of you. This can be very useful if you are feeling overwhelmed or finding it hard to cope with what's happened. Older people, isolated people, those with a preexisting mental illness or a history of trauma and those who have lost someone may need extra support in an emergency.

There are also mental health and wellbeing hubs across Victoria providing free support for those not requiring emergency or crisis support. Go to: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/-mental-health-andwellbeing-hubs or contact Partners in Wellbeing on 1300 375 330.

If you're worried about your mental health or someone you know, call Lifeline on 131 114 or the Suicide Call Back service on 1300 659 467. For more information on mental health during emergencies, go to: emergency.vic.gov.au/relief/#general_information.

Mosquitoes & flooding

Mosquitoes are a common insect that sucks blood from humans and animals. They can carry diseases that may pass on to people through their bites, such as Japanese encephalitis and Ross River virus. Major floodwater can remain for days and stagnant water is where mosquitoes can breed. To help control mosquitoes around your home, follow these tips:

- When you are able, remove stagnant water from around the home so mosquitoes can't breed.
- If possible, empty flowerpot dishes, tyres, buckets and children's toys that hold water.

To avoid mosquito bites, wear long and loose-fitting clothing as the insects can bite through tight clothes. You can also keep them out of your home with mosquito nets or insect screens. On exposed skin, use insect repellents that have the ingredients picaridin or DEET.

Some groups of people such as those aged over 50, people who spend a lot of time outside , people who live on a pig farm or work with pigs and people who live in certain areas can be vaccinated against Japanese encephalitis.
For more ways to avoid mosquito bites, search 'Beat the Bite'. For information on Murray Valley encephalitis and Ross River virus, search the Better Health Channel website.