



News for Immediate Release

Sept. 9, 2011

Public Warned of Health Threats from Floodwaters

Harrisburg – The state departments of Health (DOH) and Environmental Protection (DEP) today warned residents in central and eastern Pennsylvania of the health risks associated with coming into contact with floodwater.

A total of 159 water and sewage treatment plants have been affected, some to the point of overflow, causing sewage to leak into streams and rivers in some areas. In addition, floodwaters are carrying contaminants and debris from flooded homes and industrial sites.

“We have seen onlookers wading into floodwater to take photographs,” said DEP Secretary Mike Krancer. “We cannot stress strongly enough that it is just not safe to be in contact with this water at this time.”

Officials reminded residents the water has yet to crest in all areas. However, the state is working with local municipalities and regulators to immediately begin the process of rebuilding and recovery.

Residents should heed announcements from their local municipalities on the quality of drinking water, paying special attention to boil water advisories and requests for water conservation. Private wells that have been submersed by flooding should be tested prior to using the well water for drinking or bathing.

“Pennsylvanians’ health and safety remains our top priority,” said Department of Health Secretary Dr. Eli Avila. “We are working with local health care providers and facilities to ensure the public receives proper medical care in the affected areas and to get the word out on post-flooding health and safety guidelines.”

In the event local water supplies become contaminated, or residents observe that tap water is cloudy and/or contains an unusual odor, they should:

- Use alcohol-based, waterless hand sanitation products to clean their hands.
- Use bottled water for drinking water.
- Boil water by bringing it to a rolling boil and letting the water boil for at least one minute. Boiled or bottled water should be used for drinking, cooking, food

preparation, dishwashing, making ice/coffee, mixing baby formula and brushing teeth.

- Wear gloves to protect open scratches or wounds from contacting contaminated floodwater. Raw sewage and other bacteria in floodwaters can cause infections. Wounds should be cleaned thoroughly with soap and clean water.
- Disinfect everything the water has touched with a two-percent chlorine bleach solution. Use two or three capfuls of chlorine bleach per each bucket of water. Wear gloves and boots when disinfecting.
- Discard food that has come in contact with floodwaters. Dishes and eating and cooking utensils should be thoroughly scrubbed with a solution made of clean water and chlorine bleach.

Common health threats after flooding include gastrointestinal (GI) disease and staph infections from contaminated waters.

To prevent mold, standing water should be removed from flooded buildings within 48 hours. If you plan to be inside the building for a while or you plan to clean up mold, you should buy a N95 mask at your local home supply store and wear it while in the building.

For more information, visit www.dep.state.pa.us or www.health.state.pa.us.

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