

# Floods and Personal Protective Equipment

## Bio-hazards

During a flood, chemicals that can harm your health might be released from businesses, homes, and other sources into the water. You can come into contact with these chemicals by getting them on your skin or by breathing them from the air. If you notice an oily sheen or discoloration on or in the water, stay away from it and contact local authorities. You should remove and dispose of your clothing and wash with hot water and soap if you are exposed to any unidentified chemicals.

Floodwaters may contain disease-causing organisms, such as coliform bacteria (e.g., E. coli), hepatitis viruses, fungi, and the bacteria that cause diarrhea. If contact with the skin occurs, wash the area with hot water and soap and, in the case of cuts, also use a disinfectant. Avoid wiping your hands on your mouth, nose or eyes, as these areas are primary receptors for pathogens. These organisms can also be ingested if you eat or drink from any containers that might have come into contact with floodwaters.

Use disposable gloves while touching anything that has come in contact with floodwater. Nitrile membrane type gloves are especially effective and may be used under work gloves. Dispose of nitrile gloves after each use. Do not reuse them. Boots and hip waders will protect feet and legs but should be washed with soap and water and a mixture of bleach and water after each use.

The following links provide useful information on pathogens associated with floodwaters:

**E coli** – <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ecoliinfections.html>

**Hepatitis** – <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/hepatitis.html>

**Fungal Infections** – <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/fungalinfections.html>

**Tetanus** – <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/tetanus.html>

**Diarrhea** – <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/diarrhea.html>

Other information is available from the BC Centre for Disease Control ([www.bccdc.org](http://www.bccdc.org)) and the BC Health Guide ([www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/](http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/))