



ISLAND COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Main Office ☎Whidbey (360) 679-7350☎From S. Whidbey (360) 321-5111
☎From Camano (360) 629-4522, Fax (360) 679-7390
Camano Office ☎(360) 387-3443, Fax (360) 387-6161
www.islandcounty.net/health

HEALTH INFORMATION BULLETIN (HIB)

HIB #202

FLOODS – BE SAFE, BE HEALTHY

Is my drinking water safe?

If your well is flooded, assume the water in your home is contaminated. If you are on public water, the health department will let you know, through local media, if your water is not safe to drink. Until your water is safe, use clean bottled water that has been stored less than 6 months in tightly sealed containers. Plan for one gallon per person per day.

- If contaminated water is clear, boil it for 3 minutes to kill disease-causing bacteria and parasites, or add 1/8 teaspoon household bleach per gallon of water. Let sit for 1/2 hour.
- If contaminated water is cloudy, pour it through a coffee filter and then boil it for 3 minutes. If you can't boil it, filter it and add 1/4 teaspoon of bleach per gallon. Let it sit for 1 hour.

Will my septic system work?

The more saturated the soil, the less water a septic system can hold. Do not use your septic system when surface water is standing on the field. The ground below is saturated and can not absorb water from sink drains or toilet flushing. When soil has dried sufficiently, it is probably safe to resume using your septic system. To be sure, contact the Health Department.

How do I disinfect a dug well?

Determine the depth of the water and then, using these directions, make a solution of bleach water.

| Diameter of well | Amount of bleach to be used* |
|--|--|
| 3 feet wide | Add 1 1/2 cups of bleach per foot depth of water |
| 4 feet wide | Add 3 cups of bleach per foot depth of water |
| 6 feet wide | Add 6 cups of bleach per foot depth of water |
| 8 feet wide | Add 12 cups of bleach per foot depth of water |
| *Add the amount of bleach indicated to a 10-gallon container of water. A clean garbage can may be used for mixing. For example, if a dug well is 6 feet wide and has 5 feet of water in it, add 30 cups of bleach (6 cups x 5 feet of water = 30 cups). NOTE: There are 16 cups in a gallon. | |

Splash the solution on the walls of the well casing and seal the top. Turn each household faucet on and let the water run until you smell the bleach. Turn the water off and let it stand overnight. The next day, open all faucets and let the water run slowly until you no longer smell bleach (run the water slowly to prevent problems with the septic system).

How do I disinfect a drilled well?

Determine the depth of the water and then, using these directions, make a solution of bleach water.

| Diameter of well | Amount of water* |
|---|-----------------------|
| 3 inches wide | 0.4 gallons per foot |
| 4 inches wide | 0.65 gallons per foot |
| 6 inches wide | 1.5 gallons per foot |
| 8 inches wide | 2.6 gallons per foot |
| 10 inches wide | 4.1 gallons per foot |
| 12 inches wide | 6.0 gallons per foot |
| *Multiply the number of gallons per foot times the depth of the well. For every 100 gallons of water, add 3 cups of bleach to 10 gallons of water. For example, if your well is 3 inches wide and 100 feet deep, use 1 1/4 cups of bleach. (.4 gallons per foot X 100 feet = 40 gallons. Forty is four tenths of 100. So, .4 X 3 = 1.25 or 1 1/4 cups of bleach to approximately 4 gallons of water.) | |

Remove the well seal. Pour the bleach solution into the well. Connect a hose to the faucet closest to the well, the one commonly used for watering the lawn or washing the car. Spray the inside of the well casing for 15 minutes, being careful to wash the casing walls. Turn each household faucet on and let the water run until you smell the bleach. Turn the water off and let it stand overnight. The next day, let the water run slowly through all faucets until you no longer smell bleach (run the water slowly to prevent septic system problems).

How can I ensure the well is disinfected?

After you disinfect the well and water lines, have a sample of tap water tested for bacteria. Samples bottles are available for pick-up and drop-off at the Island County Health Department in Coupeville and at the County Annex in Camano. Before you drink the water, samples collected on two consecutive days should be rated satisfactory. Contact the Health Department if you need additional information on testing.

What should I do if my home is flooded?

Turn the utilities off and leave them off until emergency officials tell you it is safe to turn them back on. Do not pump the basement out until floodwater recedes. Avoid weakened structures, particularly floors, walls and rooftops. If you find a wild animal in your home, do not trap or corner it. Sick or injured animals may be dangerous.

What should I do if I am in my car?

Never drive through floodwater. Water can be deeper than it appears and water levels rise quickly. Follow official emergency evacuation routes. Never ignore "road closed" signs. If a car stalls in floodwater, get out quickly and get to higher ground. What special precautions do I need to take? Floodwater carries disease and other contaminants. Wash your hands with soap and disinfected water before preparing or eating food, after using the toilet or handling contaminated items.

- Wear gloves and boots. Be careful not to step on glass.
- Open all doors and windows. Use fans if possible to air out the building.
- Wash all clothes and linens in hot water.
- Discard mattresses and stuffed furniture. They can't be adequately cleaned, even with steam.
- Wash dirt and mud from walls, counters and hard surfaced floors with soap and water. Then disinfect by wiping surfaces with a solution of one cup bleach per gallon of water.
- Discard all food that has come into contact with floodwater. Canned food is all right, but disinfect the can before opening.

To keep food safe, use food that spoils rapidly first. Most food borne diseases are caused by bacteria in raw or undercooked foods of animal origin such as meat, milk, eggs, fish or shellfish. Proper storage and cooking of these foods can help prevent illness. Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to conserve cold air or keep cold food cold with ice, dry ice or snow.

It is most important to keep meat, seafood and dairy products cold. If food is cold to touch, it is probably safe to keep, use or refreeze. Discard food you would normally refrigerate if it is not cold to the touch, or if it shows obvious signs of spoilage.

To stay warm, NEVER use a gas oven, range, barbecue, hibachi or portable propane heater to heat your home. These units use up the oxygen you need to breathe and give off deadly carbon monoxide, which has caused people to die from suffocation.

To flush toilet, if it isn't damaged, pour in a bucket of water to make it flush. If it is damaged, put a large plastic bag in the toilet. Discard the bag or add 1/4 cup unscented bleach after each use to stop odor.

This Fact Sheet was adapted from *Floods*, a publication of the
Washington State Department of Health
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/floods.htm>

In Island County, Washington, for more information or assistance, contact
Island County Health Department www.islandcounty.net/health
6th and Main Streets, P.O. Box 5000, Coupeville, WA 98239
Camano Annex, 121 N.E. Camano Drive
(360) 679-7350 (office) (360) 679-7390 (fax)
24/7 Response Phone **Emergency Only**: (260) 679-9567 or (360) 629-2224 (from Camano)