Storm Recovery: Harvey

Reduce the Risk of Infection Following a Flood

Floodwaters and standing water pose many risks including the risk of infectious diseases. Patients with weakened immune systems should watch for signs and symptoms of infection. Seek immediate care from your primary care provider or care team if you have concerns.

Respiratory infections
Standing water and high humidity can increase mold in the air. People with weakened immune systems, such as patients taking chemotherapy, are more likely to get fungal infections from mold. Symptoms may include difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, stuffy nose, irritated eyes, wheezing, or skin irritation.

Water-borne gastrointestinal diseases
Swallowing floodwaters or eating food contaminated by water can lead to diarrhea. Diarrhea can lead to dehydration. Fever or vomiting may occur with diarrhea caused by infection.

Skin infections
Bacteria and fungi can infect wounds exposed to flood waters. Symptoms may include increased pain or soreness at the wound site, swelling, redness and fever.

Mosquito-borne diseases
Mosquitoes can increase after flooding. Some types of mosquitoes can spread viruses like Zika or West Nile. Symptoms of infection may include fever, headache, rash, joint pain or muscle pain. Sometimes patients do not show any symptoms.

Learn more: Flood Water After a Disaster or Emergency, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/cleanupwater.html

Prevent infections

Keep hands clean with frequent washing using clean water and soap.

Keep wounds clean and covered.

Limit your exposure to mold and water-damaged spaces. Wear an N95 mask or surgical mask when exposed to environments where mold growth is possible.

Get a flu vaccination if your doctor or care team recommend it.

Prevent mosquito bites by wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants. Use an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellent. Repellants should have one of the following active ingredients: DEET, picaridin, IR3535, oil of lemon eucalyptus, para-menthane-diol, or 2-undecanone.

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