

Possible Floodwater Exposure due to Recent Flooding in Northeastern Pennsylvania

DATE:	09/16/2023
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Debra L. Bogen, MD, FAAP, Acting Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	Possible Floodwater Exposure due to Recent Flooding in Northeastern Pennsylvania
DISTRIBUTION:	Northeast
LOCATION:	n/a
STREET ADDRESS:	n/a
COUNTY:	n/a
MUNICIPALITY:	n/a
ZIP CODE:	n/a

This transmission is a “Health Advisory” provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, INFECTION CONTROL, NURSING AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL
EMS COUNCILS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE
FQHCs: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE
LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE
PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Summary

- On September 9, 2023, severe storms caused widespread flooding in Lackawanna, Luzerne, and Wyoming Counties in Northeastern Pennsylvania.
- Exposure to floodwaters can cause multiple medical issues especially wound infections and gastrointestinal illnesses.
- Medical providers in Northeastern PA should be aware of this flooding event and ask patients about their exposures to floodwaters during medical visits over the next several weeks.
- There are multiple resources provided by the PA Department of Health (PA DOH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to educate providers and patients on the health risks of flooding and ways to mitigate those risks.

If you have any questions, please call DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or your local health department.

Background:

On September 9, 2023, severe storms caused widespread flooding in Lackawanna, Luzerne, and Wyoming Counties in Northeastern Pennsylvania. Residents did not have time to evacuate the area due to the rapid nature of the flooding event. As a result, many people were directly exposed to floodwaters. It is well known that floodwaters present hazards including exposure to bacteria and anaerobic organisms. Medical providers in northeastern PA should be aware of this flooding event and ask patients about their exposures to floodwaters during medical visits over the next several weeks.

Floodwater exposures:

Exposures to [floodwaters pose many risks](#) for people and animals. Typically, floodwaters can mix with hazardous waste and wastewater, contaminating them with harmful chemicals and bacteria. Providers should be aware of the following medical issues that result from exposure to floodwaters:

- Wound infections:
 - Open wounds exposed to wastewater and wounds that occur during the flooding event are at risk for infection.
 - Puncture wounds are especially at risk.
 - Patients should seek medical attention if the wound shows signs of infection including increased pain, redness, swelling, drainage, or fever.
- Rashes
- Gastrointestinal illness due to [E. coli](#), [Salmonella](#), or [Hepatitis A](#):
 - Floodwaters may contain sewage. Food or drink that was contaminated by floodwaters should not be eaten.
 - Children should not play in floodwater areas or with toys that may have been contaminated by floodwaters.
 - People should not bathe in water that may have been contaminated by floodwaters.
- [Tetanus](#)
- [Leptospirosis](#)

What Providers can do:

- Providers should be aware and ask about any possible exposures to the recent floodwaters during medical visits.
- Providers should make sure that all their patients are up-to-date with their routine vaccines.
- Providers should have a low threshold to evaluate all suspected wound infections and gastrointestinal illness for possible exposure to contaminated water.
- Providers should direct patients to educational resources which provide instructions on how to safely clean up after the flood.

Resources:

- [Flood Waters or Standing Waters | Water, Sanitation, & Hygiene-related Emergencies & and Outbreaks | Healthy Water | CDC](#)
- [Staying Safe After Flooding \(pa.gov\)](#)
- [Sanitation and Hygiene After a Flood \(pa.gov\)](#)
- [Cleaning and Sanitizing with Bleach|Natural Disasters and Severe Weather \(cdc.gov\)](#)
- [Educational Materials by Topic | Natural Disasters | CDC](#)
- [Floods | CDC](#)
- [Flooding and Tetanus \(pa.gov\)](#)
- [Emergency Wound Care|Natural Disasters and Severe Weather \(cdc.gov\)](#)

If you have additional questions about this guidance, please contact DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or your local health department.

Individuals interested in receiving PA-HANs are encouraged to register at [HAN Notification Registration \(mir3.com\)](#)

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of September 16, 2023, but may be modified in the future.
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