

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**For More Information Contact**

**Release CO 01-11**

Larry Hill (757) 683-9175

Cell: (757) 449-4287

**FLOOD WATERS POSE HEALTH RISKS**

(Eastern, Va.)—Hurricanes can cause flooding. Although skin contact with flood waters does not, by itself, pose a serious health risk, health hazards are a concern when waters become contaminated. Flood waters may contain fecal material, associated bacteria and viruses.

The Virginia Department of Health recommends the following precautions to prevent possible illness from flood waters:

- Basic hygiene is critical. Wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected before preparing or eating food, after toilet use, after participating in flood cleanup activities and after handling articles contaminated with flood water or sewage.
- Avoid eating or drinking anything that has been contaminated with flood water.
- Do not wade through standing water. If you do, bathe and put on clean clothes as soon as possible.
- Avoid contact with flood waters if you have open cuts or sores. If you have any open cuts or sores and cannot avoid contact with flood waters, keep them as clean as possible to control infection by washing well with soap. If a wound develops redness, swelling, or drainage, seek immediate medical attention. Residents who sustain lacerations and/or puncture wounds and have not had a tetanus vaccination within the past 10 years require a tetanus booster.
- If there is a backflow of sewage into your house, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Remove and discard absorbent household materials, such as wall coverings, cloth, rugs, and sheetrock. Clean walls and hard-surfaced floors with soap and water and disinfect with a solution of one-quarter cup of bleach to one gallon of water. Thoroughly disinfect food contact surfaces (counter tops, refrigerators, tables) and areas where small children play. Wash all linens and clothing in hot water. Air dry larger items in the sun and spray them with a disinfectant. Steam clean all carpeting.

If your plumbing is functioning slowly or sluggishly, you should:

- Conserve water as much as possible; the less water used the less sewage the septic tank must process. Minimize use of your washing machine. Go to a Laundromat. Rental of a portable toilet for a temporary period may be another option.

(more)

- If you cannot use your plumbing without creating a sanitary nuisance, i.e., without sewage being exposed, consider moving to a new location until conditions improve.
- Do not have the septic tank and drain field repaired until the ground has dried. Often systems are completely functional when unsaturated conditions return. Any repair must be permitted and inspected by your county health department.

For more information about how to protect yourself and your family before, during and after natural disasters, visit [www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov) or the Virginia Department of Emergency Management's Web site at [www.vaemergency.com](http://www.vaemergency.com).

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