



## **Press Release**

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### **GCHD Issues Health-Related Precautions Following Hurricane Ike**

**Galveston County and Cities** - The Galveston County Health District is issuing the following health-related precautions for people in areas impacted by Hurricane Ike.

In the hardest hit areas of Galveston County health officials worry that damage to the public health infrastructure could result in injuries, illnesses, disease outbreaks, stress-related consequences, and even deaths. To minimize such risks, Galveston County health officials stress many precautions.

Do not return to evacuated areas until instructed to do so by local officials. Once you are able to safely return to your property, take the following precautions to reduce risk of illness and injury.

#### **General:**

- Returning home after a hurricane can be an extremely emotional experience. Try to rest and conserve energy and avoid heat stress. Persons with heart conditions and other illnesses should avoid strenuous exertion and related stressors.
- Carry hand sanitizer and use frequently and also wash hands frequently during cleanup to lessen recontamination of cleaned areas.
- Do not allow children to play in or near flood water, debris, or storm drains.

- Disinfect all furniture, woodwork and other household surfaces in homes that have flooded.
- To prevent allergic reactions and other health problems caused by mold, replace porous wallboard (from at least 12 inches above the waterline) that has been flood-damaged.
- Disinfect children's toys with a solution of one cup bleach to five gallons of water.
- To prevent producing toxic fumes, do not mix bleach with products that contain ammonia.

### **Water:**

- Heed public drinking water safety notices issued by local officials. Contact your local emergency management office for information, [http://www.gcoem.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=32&Itemid=199](http://www.gcoem.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=32&Itemid=199)
- Even after water supply is restored, follow instructions in "boil water" alerts that may be issued by local officials and water utilities. Do not drink water from unknown sources.
- People under boil water alerts and those with private wells that may have been contaminated by flood water should use only bottled, boiled or treated water until water has been tested and found safe.
- When boiling water for drinking purposes, allow it to boil for at least one minute. Water also may be disinfected with chlorine or iodine (follow package directions) or with ordinary household bleach — one-eighth teaspoon (about eight drops) per gallon of water. Sterilize water containers and drinking utensils with a solution of household bleach.

### **Food:**

- Do not eat food that has been in contact with flood water.
- If electricity has been off, refrigerated food may have spoiled. Discard any food that has been at room temperature for more than two hours or if it has an unusual odor or color. Thawed food from freezers may be safe for consumption or refreezing if it is still partially frozen or is "refrigerator cold."
- Babies on formula should be given ready-to-feed formula or powdered formula prepared with bottled drinking water.
- Wash hands with soap and disinfected water before eating or handling food, after clean-up work and after handling flood water-contaminated items.

## **Environmental Hazards:**

- Return home in daylight for best visibility to be aware of any unsafe power sources. Do not use lanterns or torches until after the premises are safe from gas leaks.
- Do not re-enter your home, while flooded, unless the main electrical switch has been turned off.
- Wear protective footwear such as work boots in post-flood areas to reduce the chances of punctures or cuts from nails and other sharp contaminated objects.
- Do not use charcoal and gasoline-powered generators indoors. Read and follow the manufacturer's safety instructions for operation.
- Do not handle any wildlife. Seek immediate treatment if bitten or injured by an animal and contact your local animal control. Snakes and other wildlife may seek shelter in trees, homes and vehicles. They are often injured in heavy rains and winds.
- Be aware of any strange animals roaming the streets. Citizens should leave pet rescue to people trained in handling frightened and aggressive animals. Contact your local animal control. They are currently working with several national pet rescue groups in the aftermath of Ike.
- With all of the debris rodent control is also very important. The Galveston County Health District will have rat bait available to residents for free. For information, call (409) 938-2411.

## **Vaccinations:**

- Tetanus is a serious but preventable disease that causes severe muscle spasms, lockjaw and even death. Tetanus shots are routinely recommended every ten years. If you have not had one, get a tetanus shot prior to removing debris.
- Persons with puncture wounds or cuts exposed to flood water could be at risk of contracting tetanus. If you receive a puncture or laceration, seek medical attention. You may need a tetanus shot if you have not had one in the last five years.
- If you get a cut or open wound while working with storm debris, wash it thoroughly with soap and warm, clean water to avoid infection. Apply an antibiotic ointment. For more serious wounds, seek medical attention.
- Other vaccinations may be recommended for some persons, especially first responders, if necessary depending on your risk, environmental factors, etc. Consult a health provider at an area vaccination clinic.

## **Mosquito Bites**

Health officials caution residents that mosquito activity is increasing in the aftermath of Hurricane Ike. The mix of storm debris and standing water left behind provide many breeding grounds for mosquitoes. To prevent mosquito bites:

- When outdoors use an insect repellent containing DEET, Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus or IR3535 as directed on the label.
- Whenever possible, wear long-sleeved clothing and long-pants.
- Empty any containers that can hold water such as flowerpots, tires, buckets and other containers.
- Make sure window and door screens are in good condition.
- Seal other openings, such as those around window air conditioning units.