

May 9, 2017

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Cliff: 1039059

To: All BCEHS staff

**Re: Flood Hazards**

Currently there are significant floods occurring in areas around the province. All employees are asked to be aware of potential flood conditions in their areas. Flooding can present many serious safety and health hazards to emergency personnel. We want to ensure that crews responding to those communities work safely in spite of these hazardous conditions, in event of possible isolated flooding. If you are heading to a flood-related event or are on stand-by, please connect with the Technical Advisor on call, for any questions or guidance.

**For Your Action: Remember**

- Crews are ***not*** to perform rescues of any nature where they put themselves or their partner at risk. This includes but is not limited to swift water rescue, traversing over flooded plains or boarding boats without a Personal Flotation Device.  
[BCEHS Policy 3.3.5 Search and Rescue Situations](#)
- Crew members who are trained in SAR and wish to respond under their local SAR department must contact dispatch to be booked off duty.
- If crews identify unmanaged risks or are unsure the scene is safe they are to contact dispatch and request a supervisor to contact them for guidance.
- Crews must wear appropriate PFD and PPE as indicated.

**Information**

***Remember, consider your safety first and you will be better equipped to help others. If you have any questions or concerns please contact the on duty supervisor, dispatch, your district manager or Technical Advisor.***

**Before a Flood**

1. Know where the flood risk areas are in your district.
2. Ensure emergency survival kits are on all cars and an extra kit is in the station.
3. Watch for warning signs – usually increased heights, intensity of water flow, colour changes and leaning trees. Remember banks may become unstable and dangerous due to erosion.
4. Check [DriveBC.ca](#) often to check road conditions in your response area.
5. Go to [Emergency Management BC website](#) for information on personal emergency preparedness information.

### **Precautions during a Flood**

1. Never try to drive through floodwaters. Water can be deeper than it appears and levels can rise very quickly. In the event your vehicle is caught in flood waters and stalls – get out quickly and move to higher ground.
2. Never walk through moving water. Remember 15 cm (6 inches) of water can cause unstable footing. If you have to walk in water try to go where the water is not moving and watch for tripping hazards.
3. Remember flood waters can be:
  - Heavily contaminated with sewage, garbage, and other pollutants.
  - Electrically charged from underground or damaged powerlines.
  - Contain hazardous materials like pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers and other chemicals.
  - Fast moving and contain debris.
4. *Do not* enter any area where this type of contamination might be present. If you see or have knowledge about a serious spill or contamination, report to Emergency Management BC at 1-800-663-3456.
5. Wear gloves to avoid skin contact with anything that has been contaminated by floodwaters. Changing your gloves often and ensuring proper cleaning and decontamination procedures are followed is critical. Contact the Technical Advisor via dispatch.
6. Remember to wash your hands frequently to prevent the spread of disease.

### **Following a Flood**

Hazards following a flood can be just as dangerous as the flood itself. Be aware of the following hazards that can be encountered after a flood and take proper precautions to ensure your safety, your partners safety, and your patients safety.

1. Downed power lines should never be touched. When flood water levels appear to have subsided, electrical currents can travel through the remaining water more than 100 meters. Contact BC Hydro or the police to report downed power lines.
2. Submerged gas control valves, circuit breakers and fuses pose explosion and fire hazards.
3. Leaking propane tanks or natural gas can cause fire or explosion hazards, consider this as a possibility if called into a flooded area.
4. The longer water is allowed to stand in homes or buildings, the greater the risk to the occupant *and* to BCEHS personnel from bacteria and mold.
  - a. An N-95 respirator must be worn when in these situations.
5. Wear gloves and rubber boots to avoid skin contact with anything that has been contaminated by floodwaters.
6. Wash your hands frequently with soap and clean water to prevent the spread of disease.
7. Consider the possibility that persons without electricity during a flood may have used a BBQ or other cooking/heating device inappropriately indoors and that a high level of carbon monoxide could be present.
  - a. You must not enter the area if carbon monoxide is suspected. The patient needs to be brought to you by a rescuer wearing a source of supplied air.
  - b. Holding your breath is not considered a source of supplied air!

8. Stay out of buildings if flood waters are still present and ensure BC Hydro has disconnected the electricity before you enter.
9. In the event you must enter a building that is flood water free proceed with caution and ensure you examine the foundation for cracks or other damage. Once inside check walls, floors, doors, and windows for signs that the building is in danger of collapsing.
10. Do not drink any water from wells or public water system until you check your local health authority for Boil Water Advisories. Instead drink bottled water until you know it's safe.
11. For more information on after flood precautions, please review the HealthLinkBC [website](#).

**Additional Information:**

- Safety Topic – [Floods](#)
- Safety Topic – [Landslides](#)

Earlier this week, BCEHS opened a District Emergency Operations Centre (DEOC) in Kamloops to closely monitor this developing situation and help ensure the wellbeing of our staff throughout.

Thank you for everything you do each and every day to care for our patients and each other.

Sincerely,

*Original signed by*

Barb Fitzsimmons  
Chief Operating Officer