



# Columbia County Department of Health

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August 5, 2009

For Immediate release:

The Columbia County Health Department has been receiving questions about how to deal with flood water and deposits following the flood. Concerns have been raised about playing in back yards, parks or playgrounds, gardening, eating home-grown vegetables, etc, because of possible contamination, both biological and chemical.

According to the NYSDOH, Center for Environmental Health, Flood waters may contain sewage, animal waste and other contaminants. However, outbreaks of diseases or infections are unusual following floods. Pathogens and contaminants are usually dilute and pose little risk.

In most flood circumstances, practicing basic hygiene will be sufficient to avoid health concerns. Remember to always wash your hands with soap and clean water:

- Before preparing or eating food;
- After toilet use;
- After contacting flood water or participating in flood cleanup activities; and
- After handling articles contaminated with flood water or sewage.

Skin contact with flood water or most muddy deposits left by flooding does not pose a health threat unless you have an open wound. If an open wound gets dirty or has been exposed to flood waters, clean by washing well with soap and water, consider applying a topical antibiotic and cover the wound with a sterile bandage. In general, vaccinations, booster shots or antibiotics are not needed. However, if you receive a puncture wound or wound contaminated with feces, soil or saliva, you should seek medical attention from your physician to determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary.

Once the land has dried, most pathogens will be deactivated. Playing and gardening on such land does not pose a significant health concern. All garden vegetables should be carefully rinsed and scrubbed in clean water before eating particularly if the produce is eaten without cooking. As with any cuts or abrasions from playing, treat as described above.

If a specific source of chemicals is known or suspected, if unusual chemical odors are noticed or if sheen is on the water, then an assessment should be undertaken to determine if additional actions, such as sampling should be considered. Remember that flooding requires a large volume of water that is often fast moving. Therefore, most contamination will be substantially diluted and carried downstream. In the event that property is damaged from flooding you should contact your local town/village official and/or the Columbia County Health Department.

The Health Department can be reached at (518) 828-3358 during regular business hours Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm

For additional information about preventing injury or illness from flooding visit these websites:

[www.nyhealth.gov/environmental/emergency/flood/index.htm](http://www.nyhealth.gov/environmental/emergency/flood/index.htm) or [www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/)