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# News Release

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## Heavy Rains Create Health Risks

### *Drinking Water Wells and Onsite Sewage Systems May Be Vulnerable*

**BREMERTON, WA** — Due to the heavy rains predicted over the next several days, the Health District is advising the public to be aware of the following health risks associated with excessive surface runoff, flooding or sewage spills:

- Flood waters carry disease and other contaminants, requiring precautions to prevent illness.
- If your drinking water well is flooded, assume that the water in your home is contaminated.
- Onsite sewage systems may not function and/or are vulnerable to failure during flood conditions requiring measures to protect these systems.
- Shellfish should not be harvested during periods of heavy rain due to contaminated stormwater runoff that may pollute marine waters and shellfish beds.

If a drinking water well is flooded, the Health District advises to use bottled water that has been stored less than six months in tightly sealed containers, or take preventive measures to sanitize the potentially contaminated water. Plan for one gallon of water per person, per day.

- If contaminated water is clear, boil it for one minute to kill disease-causing bacteria and parasites, or add 1/8 teaspoon household bleach per gallon of water and let it sit for 1/2 hour.
- If contaminated water is cloudy, pour it through a coffee filter, paper towel, or cheesecloth, and then boil it for one minute. If you can't boil it, filter it and add 1/4 teaspoon of bleach per gallon, then let it sit for one hour.

Wells may require disinfection if flooded. Contact the Health District at (360) 337-5235 for instructions.

Onsite sewage systems cannot operate properly if soil in the drainfield area becomes saturated. If your drainfield is very wet or under water, reduce your indoor water use as much as possible to prevent catastrophic failure of the system. When soil has dried sufficiently, it's probably safe to resume normal water use.

During extreme wet weather, property owners can follow several simple measures to protect their sewage systems and their property investments including:

- Minimize water use in the home. Stay well below your sewage system's maximum volume capacity, normally 120 gallons of water use per bedroom per day.
- Spread water use throughout the day and week to even out water flow to your drainfield. Don't flood your system with multiple uses all at once or all in one day. One example is to shower in the morning, wash clothes midday, wash dishes in the evening, and limit clothes washing to one or two loads per day.
- Identify and repair all leaky plumbing fixtures. A running toilet or a leaky faucet can discharge many gallons of extra water each day to your drainfield.
- Identify and repair all leaky sewage system tanks, risers, etc.
- Divert all surface waters and downspouts away from your sewage system.

The Health District estimates there are 66,000 onsite sewage systems in Kitsap County.

Because floodwaters are contaminated, if the home is flooded, the Health District advises people to wash their hands with soap and disinfected water before preparing or eating food, after using the toilet, or handling contaminated items. Discard all food that has come in contact with floodwater. Canned food is all right, but disinfect the can before opening.

If the power has gone out, keep food safe by using food that spoils rapidly first. Most foodborne diseases are caused by bacteria in raw or undercooked foods of animal origin such as meat, milk, eggs, or fish. Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to conserve cold air or keep food cold with ice or dry ice.

Additional information is available online at [www.kitsapcountyhealth.com](http://www.kitsapcountyhealth.com), or by calling the Health District at (360) 337-5235.