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Potential Heavy Rains May Cause Problems with Private Wells and Sewage Systems

Taking precautions can help keep you and your family well



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Panama City, Fla. – The Florida Department of Health in Bay County is providing the following simple recommendations that can help prevent illnesses during and after flooding that may be caused by the current storm system. Forecasted rainfall totals from the National Weather Service through Friday are currently between 4 to 8 inches. At times rainfall could be at the rate of 3 inches per hour and some areas could see up to 10 inches. Precautions should be taken, especially for people on sewage systems or who have private wells that provide their drinking water.

General Precautions

- Do not let children play in flood waters as these waters may be contaminated by sewage.
- If you live in a low-lying or flood-prone area, the ground in your area may be saturated from heavy rainfalls or flooding. You should use household water as little as possible to prevent backups of sewage into your home

Private Wells

Private well owners whose drinking water wells are affected by flood waters to take precautions against disease-causing organisms that may make their water unsafe to drink.

One of the following methods is recommended as a precaution:

- Use bottled water, especially for mixing baby formula; or
- Boil water before use, holding it at rolling boil for at least one minute before using it for drinking, washing, cooking, etc.; or
- Disinfect water by adding 8 drops (about 1/8 tsp – this would form a puddle about the size of a dime) of plain unscented household bleach (4 to 6%) per gallon of water, and then let it stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy after 30 minutes, repeat the procedure. Use a container that has a cap or cover for disinfecting and storing water to be used for drinking. This will prevent contamination.

After the flooding subsides:

- Disinfect your well using the procedures available from the Florida Department of Health in Bay County or provided by the Florida Department of Health at <http://www.floridahealth.gov/healthy-environments/private-well-testing/index.html>; and

- Contact the Florida Department of Health in Bay County for private well sampling instructions or have your drinking well water sampled for coliform bacteria by a laboratory certified by the State of Florida to perform drinking water analysis.
- Continue to use bottled/boiled/disinfected water until lab tests confirm that it is safe.

Sewage Systems

During periods of heavy rain, you may be experiencing difficulties with your sewage system not functioning properly.

What should I do if sewage backs up?

- If a sewage backup has occurred in your home, stay out of affected areas and keep children away. If your entire home has been saturated, abandon the home until all affected areas, including but not limited to carpets, rugs, sheetrock, drywall, and baseboards, have been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- If sewage has overflowed in open areas or streets, etc., avoid these areas and keep children out of these areas.
- Do not have your septic tank(s) pumped as long as the water level is abnormally high. Pumping the tank in that situation could result in the tank being crushed.
- If you are having problems in areas served by sewer systems, please contact your utility company to insure they are aware of problems in your area.

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