



## Flooding – Frequently Asked Health Questions

["I think floods may be coming soon to my local area - what should I do?"](#)

["What is the most dangerous thing about a flood?"](#)

["What's the best health advice - isn't there a risk from bugs in the water?"](#)

["Why doesn't PHE recommend testing floodwaters routinely?"](#)

["What if I start to feel unwell?"](#)

["Did many people fall ill after the summer 2007 floods?"](#)

["How do I check if my local health services are affected \(eg GPs, outpatient appointments\)?"](#)

["Should I take any precautions regarding my children?"](#)

["Should I take any precautions regarding my pets?"](#)

["Is food safe to eat?"](#)

["How do I prepare food safely?"](#)

["What do I do with flood-damaged food?"](#)

["How should I clean up my home safely?"](#)

["What should I do if my domestic property is flooded?"](#)

["How and what to clean"](#)

["What are the chemical hazards involved in floods and cleaning up?"](#)

["Who is responsible for the safety of my mains water supply?"](#)

["My mains water tastes funny - what should I do?"](#)

["How do I use tap water that may be contaminated?"](#)

["I've been advised to boil my mains water - what do I need to know?"](#)

["What if my water comes from a private supply?"](#)

["How do I clean bowls and buckets for water containers which have been in the floodwater?"](#)

["How should I use the bowser and bottled water supplied to replace mains water?"](#)

["How do I flush the toilet with no mains water?"](#)

["What if the toilet can't be flushed at all because of blockage?"](#)

["How will I know if my septic tank system has been affected?"](#)

["If I don't have mains water how should I bottle feed my baby?"](#)

["How do I bathe my child without mains water?"](#)

["Can I use water for my contact lenses?"](#)

## I think floods may be coming soon to my local area – what should I do?

If available for your neighbourhood, sign up for free flood warning messages from the Environment Agency to receive phone, text or email messages about when flooding is expected.

Listen out for flood warnings on radio and television and follow any advice from the emergency services. You can also phone the Environment Agency Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or 0845 988 1188.

Know what the levels of flood warning mean:

- Flood Alert: Flooding is possible. Be prepared
- Flood Warning: Flooding is expected. Immediate action required
- Severe Flood Warning: Severe flooding. Danger to life

Make a personal Flood Plan for what you will do if there is a flood. Advice on how to make a plan and a self-complete template is available from the [Environment Agency website](#).

Pack a “flood kit” in case you need to leave your home. Be sure to include:

- Medicines and medical devices, hearing aid batteries, glasses and contact lenses
- Phone numbers, insurance documents, bank cards and money
- Clothing, toothbrush and personal items. If you have a baby, pack nappies, clothing and baby food

Sandbags are heavy: take care while filling and handling sandbags to avoid injury.

## What is the most dangerous thing about a flood?

The effects of flooding on health are extensive and significant, ranging from death from drowning and injuries from accident, to infectious diseases and mental health problems (short and long term).

Accidents happen in fast flowing floodwater. Avoid walking or driving in or near floodwater. Driving in floodwater significantly increases risk of drowning. Do not let children play in floodwater. There could be hidden dangers like sharp objects, raised manhole covers and pollution. Walking or even driving through floodwater is risky – six inches of fast flowing water can knock you over and two feet of water will float your car.

The other main health hazard in floods come from the stress and strain of the event and clean-up. Take time to look after your and your family’s mental health and wellbeing. Do not overexert yourself and be careful not to hurt yourself when preparing your home and moving important things to a higher place.

Know how to turn off your gas, electricity and water before floodwater enters your home and do not touch sources of electricity if you are standing in water.

Ensure good ventilation if using portable indoor heating appliances to dry out indoor spaces.

Do not use petrol or diesel generators or other similar fuel-driven equipment indoors: the exhaust gases contain carbon monoxide, which can kill.

## What's the best health advice – isn't there a risk from bugs in the water?

Infection problems arising from floods in this country are rare. Usually any harmful bugs in floodwater become very diluted and present a low risk, but there are a few precautions to be aware of when dealing with flooding which should prevent unnecessary additional health problems:

- wherever possible, try to avoid coming into direct contact with floodwater. If you have to go into the water, wear waterproof gloves and rubber boots and remember to be careful of potentially concealed hazards
- wash your hands – this is the most important way to get rid of harmful bugs. Use warm, clean water and soap, then rinse and dry your hands after going to the toilet, before eating or preparing food, after being in contact with floodwater, sewage or with items that have been in the water. Use cold water to wash if warm is not available. If there is no clean water, use disposable soapy, wet wipes or sanitising gel to carefully clean all parts of your hands and dry them
- keep open cuts or sores clean and use waterproof plasters to prevent them being exposed to floodwater
- keep children out of the water
- do not eat any food that has been in contact with floodwater or sewage

## Why doesn't PHE recommend testing floodwaters routinely?

During flooding, sewage systems may become inundated by floodwater. Consequently floodwater is likely to be contaminated by disease producing bacteria and viruses, however infection problems arising from floods in this country are rare. Microbiological testing of the floodwater is therefore likely to find disease causing micro-organisms so for this reason we do not recommend routinely carrying out microbiological testing on floodwater.

## What if I start to feel unwell?

If you feel unwell this does not necessarily mean that you are suffering from any infection. If you are concerned, then call '111'. A textphone service is also available if you are deaf or hard of hearing. The [textphone number](#) is 18001 111. Alternatively, you may wish to visit your family doctor.

Avoid contact with floodwater and wash your hands regularly. Swallowing floodwater or mud can cause diarrhoea, fever or abdominal pain. Mention the flood if you see your GP with abdominal complaints that started within 10 days of being exposed to floodwater or sewage contamination.

Remember that flooding is stressful. It is normal to feel anxious, upset and experience difficulty sleeping. Take care of yourself and your family and check on elderly and vulnerable friends and neighbours. Contact friends and family for support as it can take a long time for life to return to normal.

## Did many people fall ill after the summer 2007 floods?

Throughout the summer 2007 floods, PHE kept a close watch on the health of communities affected by flooding to track any changes in the rates of reported infectious disease. From data collected from GPs, hospital laboratories, NHS Direct calls, and local health protection teams, PHE found no evidence of increased outbreaks of illness due to the floods. This was in line with previous experience from floods in developed countries, including the UK.

## How do I check if my local health services are affected (eg GPs, outpatient appointments)?

If you can, use the usual local telephone numbers for your health services. Dial '111' if you have non-urgent health concerns. A [textphone service](#) is also available if you are deaf or hard of hearing. The textphone number is 18001 111.

Make sure your family take their medicines and attend scheduled medical appointments.

## Should I take any precautions regarding my children?

Do not allow children to play in floodwater areas.

Do wash children's hands frequently – particularly after playing outdoors and always before meals.

Do seek medical advice, as under normal circumstances, if infants are unwell with diarrhoea, fever or abdominal pain.

Do wash floodwater-contaminated toys with hot water and detergent before allowing them to be used. For soft toys, put them in a hot (60°C) machine wash, along with any other affected fabric items. Wash clothes that have come into contact with floodwater on a separate cycle from other clothes.

## Should I take any precautions regarding my pets?

Infections in pets during and after periods of flooding in this country are very rare and usually any harmful bacteria in floodwater become very diluted and present a low risk. However, swallowing floodwater, mud or, most importantly, rubbish/foreign materials that have been brought in to the garden by the flood waters, can cause stomach upsets or diarrhoea. There are a few precautions to be aware of which should prevent health problems:

- Avoid direct contact with floodwater and prevent your pet from drinking flood water (running or standing water). If there is still a significant amount of water in the environment, keep your dog on a lead or limit access to the garden and public land as much as possible until the water has receded.
- Keep pets out of the affected area until clean-up has been completed – ensure that you remove all obvious signs of contamination and any accumulated rubbish once the flood water has receded before allowing your pet free/unsupervised access to the garden.

- Clean away mud and dry your pet well after outdoor access and wash your own and your children's hands frequently when handling a pet that has been outdoors.
- Ensure your pets vaccination and deworming is up to date. Contact your local vet if you need advice and more information.

Further information is also available at [www.gov.uk/animal-welfare-in-severe-weather](http://www.gov.uk/animal-welfare-in-severe-weather)

## Is food safe to eat?

The Food Standards Agency advises people not to eat any food that has been touched or covered by floodwater or sewage. Do not eat any produce grown on an allotment or garden that has been flooded.

If you have a catering business and have been affected by flooding, ask for advice from the environmental health service at your local authority.

## How do I prepare food safely?

Clean and disinfect work surfaces, plates, pans, cutlery, plastic/ceramic chopping boards etc before using them with food. If you have a working dishwasher and mains water supply, this is a more efficient way to clean and sanitise smaller items. Discard wooden chopping boards and wooden spoons if contaminated by floodwater.

Thoroughly clean the inside of your fridge and food cupboards if they have been touched by floodwater.

If your fridge has not been working and has been left unopened, food will be safe for four hours. If your fridge has not been working for more than four hours, it is advisable to throw away the food inside.

If your freezer has not been working throw away any food that has started to get soft, including food that is intended to be eaten from frozen (eg ice cream). Depending upon how full the freezer is, produce can remain frozen and safe for 24 hours or more if the freezer door is left unopened.

PHE advises the maxim "when in doubt throw it out".

## What do I do with flood-damaged food?

Put flood-damaged food in black plastic refuse sacks, double bagged if possible, seal and put out when your next refuse collection is due.

Remember to check with insurers before disposal because food may be insured. Do not be tempted to try to salvage damaged food including tins as they may be damaged or contaminated.

## How should I clean up my home safely?

PHE in partnership with the Environment Agency has published the following public guidance for flooding: [www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb\\_C/1317140405287](http://www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1317140405287)

**Protective clothing:** wear rubber boots, overalls, (preferably waterproof) and waterproof gloves during the clean-up. If you are scrubbing, hosing or pressure-washing, you may cause a lot of splashing and it is a good idea to wear a standard face mask, such as those sold by DIY stores. Goggles offer added protection and they can be reused after thorough washing. Pressure washing equipment must only be used in outdoor environments. Remember to wash your hands thoroughly after each clean-up session. Also wash clothes used for cleaning on a separate cycle from your other clothes.

**Electricity:** Do not turn on electrics if they may have got wet. Only turn them on when they have been checked by a qualified electrician.

**Children and pets:** Keep children and pets out of the affected area until clean-up has been completed.

**Insurance:** If insured, call your insurance company as soon as possible and follow its advice. Take photographs before you start cleaning and ask your insurer before discarding items that cannot be cleaned (eg mattresses and carpets).

**Sandbags:** The Environment Agency advises that sandbags tend to retain contaminants such as sewage and oils when they come into contact with floodwater. Ensure you wear gloves and wash hands thoroughly after handling. If sandbags are contaminated by floodwater you should take them to your local civic amenity site and inform the staff that they have been contaminated. Where this is not possible you should seek advice from your local authority as to whether any other options are available to dispose of the sandbags.

If sandbags need to be stored temporarily whilst awaiting disposal it is best to lay them out so they can dry rather than stacking them. Choose an area away from pets and children, preferably in direct sunlight to hasten the weathering process.

Do not place full sandbags or the sand in your household waste. Do not allow children to play with the sand or place it in sand pits due to the risks from possible contamination.

If in doubt, contact your local authority environmental health department for advice and the location of your nearest civic amenity site.

## What should I do if my domestic property is flooded?

During flooding, sewage systems may become inundated by floodwater. Consequently floodwater is likely to be contaminated by disease causing bacteria and viruses, however infection problems arising from floods in this country are rare especially during cooler weather. Wherever possible, try to avoid direct contact with floodwater but if you have to, there are a few precautions and good hygiene practices which should prevent unnecessary additional health problems.

- **Washing your hands** is the most important way to get rid of harmful micro-organisms after contact with floodwater, or with items that have been in the water. Use warm, clean water

and soap, then rinse and dry your hands. Use cold water to wash if warm is not available. If there is no clean water, use disposable soapy, wet wipes or sanitising gel to carefully clean all parts of your hands and dry them. Always clean your hands after going to the toilet and before eating or preparing food.

- **Wear protective clothing** such as waterproof gloves, and rubber boots if you have to go into the water. Consider wearing goggles while washing areas of your property. Remember to be careful of potentially concealed hazards under the water. Waterproof gloves are recommended when cleaning material where flooding has occurred.
- **Keep open cuts or sores clean** and use waterproof plasters as well as protective clothing during clean-up to prevent exposure to floodwater
- **Do not to eat any food that has been touched or covered by floodwater or sewage.** The Food Standards Agency advises people not to eat any produce grown on an allotment or garden that has been flooded.
- **Keep children away from floodwater** – Do not allow children to play in floodwater. Children should wash their hands frequently – particularly after playing outdoors and always before meals. Seek medical advice, as under normal circumstances, if infants are unwell with diarrhoea, fever or abdominal pain.
- **If you feel unwell** this does not necessarily mean that you are suffering from any infection. If you are concerned, then call 111. Swallowing floodwater has the potential to cause diarrhoea, fever or abdominal pain. Mention the flood if you see your GP within 10 days of flooding.
- **Once floodwater recedes, clean your home safely** by washing all surfaces with hot soapy water and household cleaning agent, and wear protective clothing. Any solid wastes can be removed using clean absorbent material, such as paper towels, which should be disposed of through normal domestic refuse disposal.

## How and what to clean

- Clean and disinfect work surfaces, plates, pans, cutlery, chopping boards etc before using them with food. If you have a working dishwasher, this is a more efficient way to clean and sanitise smaller items. Discard wooden chopping boards and wooden spoons if contaminated by floodwater.
- Thoroughly clean all other hard surfaces, including walls, hard-surfaced floors and furniture with ordinary household detergent or bleach, until they look clean. Allow to dry thoroughly – this will also help to destroy germs left behind.
- Other soft furnishings that have been contaminated and cannot be put in a washing machine will have to be cleaned professionally or, if this is not possible, may have to be disposed of.
- Do not mix detergents with chlorine based bleaches as this may release hazardous fumes.
- Remember to take regular breaks in the fresh air.
- Remove and discard all soft furnishings and fittings that are damaged beyond repair or mouldy.
- Remove dirty water and silt from the property including the space under the ground floor if you have wooden floors. This space may need pumping out.



- If you need to store water, try not to use the same containers used to empty floodwater and mud from your home.
- Heating, dehumidifiers and good ventilation can help dry out your home. You may notice mould growing on damp walls. This will stop growing as your home dries out. Heating, dehumidifiers and good ventilation can help dry out your home. If dehumidifiers are powered by generators, make sure generators are outside at a safe distance from building air intakes. Small areas of mould can be removed easily with proprietary mould removal solutions available in hardware stores. If the mould persists or is extensive it may be advisable to contact a specialist cleaner. If you choose to contact a specialist cleaner to help remediate an extensive mould problem, it is important that they have experience in the field of fungal remediation, and follow current guidance.

**Clothing and bedding:** Wash floodwater-contaminated toys with hot water and detergent before allowing them to be used. For soft toys, put them in a hot (60°C) machine wash, along with any other affected fabric items. Wash clothes used for cleaning on a separate cycle from your other clothes.

If you suspect problems with your drainage system, it is recommended that a launderette be used for washing large quantities of clothes and linens until your waste-water system has been checked.

**Living in your flood-damaged home:** It is recommended that you only fully reoccupy your home once the above cleaning has been carried out. Stay with friends or family, or ask your local authority to help you find alternative accommodation if your home has been damaged by floodwater. Only return to your home when essential repairs and cleaning have been completed.

If you have gas or oil central heating and it has been checked by an engineer, turn it on. Keep the thermostat between 20-22°C for steady drying.

If you are drying your property naturally, keep doors and windows open as much as possible. If using dehumidifiers, close external doors and windows. If dehumidifiers are powered by generators, make sure generators are outside at a safe distance from building air intakes.

If you have air bricks to any under floor spaces, ensure that these are unblocked to give cross ventilation to these areas. As floorboards and walls continue to dry out, any loose material and dust resulting from this should be vacuumed up on a regular basis.

**Mould:** You may notice mould growing on damp walls. This will stop growing as your home dries out. Heating, dehumidifiers and good ventilation can help dry out your home. If dehumidifiers are powered by generators, make sure generators are outside at a safe distance from building air intakes. Small areas of mould can be removed easily with proprietary mould removal solutions available in hardware stores. If the mould persists or is extensive it may be advisable to contact a specialist cleaner. If you choose to contact a specialist cleaner to help remediate an extensive mould problem, it is important that they have experience in the field of fungal remediation, and follow current guidance.

**Rats and other pests:** Rats can move into homes due to flooding of their nests, but they are generally wary of humans. If normal waste collection services are disrupted for any reason, the



build-up of waste may attract rats and other pests. Store your rubbish in hard bins or if this is not possible, try to keep rubbish bags in a place away from your home. If you handle rubbish bags that you think rats may have contaminated with urine or droppings, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

Avoid approaching or cornering rats. If you are bitten by a rat then seek medical advice, and be sure to mention the exposure to rats.

If you have to pick up a dead rat, wear gloves and dispose of the rats in a plastic bag. Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water afterwards.

## What are the chemical hazards involved in floods and cleaning up?

**Carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning:** Remember that petrol or diesel generators and other fuel driven outdoor equipment (including fuel-driven DIY equipment) should never be brought indoors or to other enclosed spaces. The exhaust gases contain carbon monoxide which can quickly build up to poisonous levels without good ventilation.

CO is produced when fossil fuels such as gas, petrol, diesel, coal, coke and oil and other fuels such as wood and charcoal burn without enough air. Incorrectly installed, poorly maintained or poorly ventilated cooking and heating devices are the main sources. Exposure to high indoor levels can be fatal, while exposure to lower levels can result in symptoms that resemble flu, viral infections or food poisoning. Headache, tiredness, difficulty in thinking clearly and feeling sick are the most common symptoms. Drowsiness, dizziness, shortness of breath and chest pains may also be experienced. Prolonged exposure to low levels of CO over a long period of time can cause serious harm to health, often leading to lasting neurological damage in victims.

It is important to have all cooking and heating appliances which use fossil fuels (and wood) installed and serviced regularly by a suitably qualified, reputable and registered engineer and that they are operated according to the manufacturers' instructions. Do not turn on appliances which use fossil fuels (and wood) if they may have got wet until checked by a qualified engineer. Rooms in which these appliances are used must be adequately ventilated. Chimneys and flues should be kept clear and swept from top to bottom at least once a year by a qualified sweep.

**Car batteries:** Older batteries may leak acid, so it is advisable to use rubber gloves when handling them. Car batteries are normally disposed of at civic amenity sites.

**Household chemicals:** Be aware of potential chemical hazards during floods. Floodwater may have displaced containers of hazardous chemicals such as cleaning products, garden pesticides and domestic heating oil from their normal storage places. Wear rubber gloves to handle any of this packaging.

**Oil in floodwater:** Oil films may be seen floating on the floodwaters both inside buildings and surrounding areas. It is recommended that these films should not be disturbed and exposure to them should be avoided as skin exposure may cause a variety of skin conditions.

Any remaining oil contamination in accessible areas can be removed by using a detergent solution and washing the surface down after initial cleaning has been carried out. Inaccessible areas such as under floorboards may present an odour problem but is not necessarily a health

hazard. Further advice should be sought from environmental health staff if the odour persists or if you are particularly concerned about it for other reasons.

**Petrol in floodwater:** Petrol films may be seen floating on the floodwater both inside buildings and surrounding areas. It is recommended that these films should not be disturbed and exposure to them should be avoided as skin exposure may cause a variety of skin conditions and the vapour may be irritating to eyes and lungs.

Floodwaters should be allowed to subside and on contact with the ground the petrol allowed to evaporate.

As is normal practice people are reminded not to smoke or have fire sources such as matches in the vicinity of petrol films.

**Enclosed areas:** Avoid enclosed areas that may be chemically contaminated, such as garages and cellars where concentrations of fumes may build up once the floodwaters have receded. Before entering, ensure such confined areas have good ventilation, with doors and windows open, and do not allow children and animals to enter.

**Gas systems:** Do not turn on gas systems if they may have got wet. Only turn them on when they have been checked by a qualified gas engineer.

## Who is responsible for the safety of my mains water supply?

People whose water comes through a mains supply should follow the advice of their local water company regarding the safety of their water supply. In most flooding circumstances, the mains water supply remains safe.

Water companies have a duty to take all necessary steps to protect public health. For example, should a water treatment works become flooded, alternative supplies will be made available, such as by bottled water or bowser, but in the meantime consumers may be advised to boil water before drinking or temporarily stop using water for domestic purposes.

## My mains water tastes funny – what should I do?

If you notice a change in water quality, such as the water becoming discoloured or a change in taste or smell, or if you are unsure, ring your local water company. Whilst waiting for an answer, and if water is urgently required, boil all water intended for drinking or use bottled water.

## How do I use tap water that may be contaminated?

The quality of tap water is the responsibility of your local water company, supervised by the Drinking Water Inspectorate. The mains water supply and distribution network is not normally affected by flooding, so it is safe to use the water in the usual way. If for any reason it is not safe to drink, the water company will inform you.

If there is evidence that the tap water may be contaminated, the water company will issue advice to boil the water.

Bring the water to the boil and then allow it to cool before drinking. Do not store large quantities of boiled water in open containers, such as bins, as they may become contaminated over time.

Boil water and allow it to cool before using it to wash food that won't be cooked, such as fruit or salad. It is safe to use unboiled tap water in the preparation of food which is to be cooked. It is also safe to use unboiled tap water for cooking if it will be boiled during the cooking process.

## **I've been advised to boil my mains water – what do I need to know?**

There are three kinds of water notices for different circumstances: Boil tap water before use; do not drink your tap water; Do not use your tap water.

If you have been advised to boil your water before use, this will be for drinking and food preparation. All water for these purposes should be brought to a boil and then allowed to cool before using. Remember that boiling water can carry a risk of scalding accidents. It is advisable to use a kettle rather than pots and pans. If you must use open containers such as pots and pans, then special care should be taken when young children or vulnerable people are involved. Keep panhandles turned inwards when boiling water in pans so that children cannot reach them. Once boiled water begins to cool it is vulnerable to recontamination from hands and kitchen utensils so it is important that boiled water is used as soon as possible.

Water from a bowser should be safe to drink but it requires boiling before use because the containers used to transfer water from bowser to home may not be clean.

Water from the hot tap is not suitable for drinking, whether in flood circumstances or not.

## **What if my water comes from a private supply?**

If your water is a private supply such as a well or spring, then check that it has not been affected by the floodwater. If a private well or spring has been covered by floodwater, proceed with caution and ring your local authority for advice. While waiting for an answer or if in doubt, assume the water is unsafe to drink and source an alternative supply.

Boiling water kills pathogenic bacteria, viruses and parasites but does not remove harmful chemicals, which is why sourcing an alternative supply is recommended.

## **How do I clean bowls and buckets for water containers which have been in the floodwater?**

Use an appropriately diluted bleach solution or sterilising tablets, following manufacturers' instructions, to clean containers. Use water storage tanks and other types of containers with caution. This applies particularly to pans and utensils used in cooking or food preparation.

Ensure the water taps are cleaned with hot water and detergent before using them for the first time after a flood. Allow the taps to run for a few minutes when you start using the mains water again, as this should clear the pipes.

## How should I use the bowser and bottled water supplied to replace mains water?

Only bowser water which has been boiled and left to cool or bottled water should be used for drinking (note below regarding bottle-fed infants), brushing teeth, washing food and making ice.

If there is no gas or electricity available to householders to boil water, bottled water should be used in all circumstances.

## How do I flush the toilet with no mains water?

With restrictions in drinking water supply there may be insufficient water for flushing toilets. It is therefore important that all water used for washing, bathing, and from cooking (ie water from boiled vegetables) or washing up is saved in buckets to be used for flushing. It is not necessary to flush the toilet after urination. Other sources of water, for example, from garden water butts can also be used for flushing.

## What if the toilet can't be flushed at all because of blockage?

The following options may be available to householders whose toilets cannot be used:

- it may be possible and practicable to use the facilities of unaffected family, friends, neighbours, public toilets, rest centres, local shops, supermarkets and hotels. Chemical toilets ("portaloos") may be provided in your area
- portable bag in bag products (eg "Brief relief", "wag bag") designed for solid and urine waste may be provided in your area. Remember to wash your hands after using these bag products. Once used according to manufacturers' instructions, the waste bag should be placed inside another bag, such as a bin liner, and disposed of in the usual way

## How will I know if my septic tank system has been affected??

Septic tank systems typically comprise a concrete, plastic or fibreglass tank. In a functioning system, the solids in the wastewater settle in a primary tank, the wastewater is then discharged through pipes into soil in a designated area on your property often called a soakaway or drainage field.

Failed systems are not easy to identify, however some simple indications may include:

- a pungent odour around the tank and land application area
- blocked fixtures and wastewater overflowing from the relief point
- high sludge levels within the primary tank
- sewage flowing up through the toilet and sinks

Immediate actions – While there is general flooding in your area:

- while a flood is in progress homeowners are advised to eliminate all non-essential water use and flush toilets as little as possible. Continue to do this until the ground is no longer flooded. The Waterwise website has quick tips on reducing water use in the home
- although this is unlikely to be sustainable in the long term, it may be necessary to arrange to have your septic tank emptied and the contents removed by a contractor on a regular basis until the ground is no longer flooded
- before having your tank emptied get advice from your drainage contractor as in some circumstances emptying the tank can cause mud or silt to be drawn into the tank or, in extreme cases, result in it lifting out of the ground

If your septic tank system becomes covered with water:

- if the area where your septic tank and/or drainage field is located becomes covered with water if possible do not use the system at all and avoid contact with any standing water that may contain sewage. Continue to do this until the septic tank and/or drainage field is no longer covered in water and make arrangement to have your tank emptied if the situation allows
- consider hiring temporary portable services
- if you see pollution please report it to the Environment Agency incident hotline 0800 80 70 60 (Freephone, 24 hour service) so that a team can investigate and take appropriate action

## If I don't have mains water how should I bottle feed my baby?

If your drinking water supply is either interrupted or contaminated by the flooding and you need to prepare formula feed for a baby, it is important to be careful with the water you use. Here are some tips from the Food Standards Agency on preparing formula safely.

- ideally use water from a bowser (a water tank provided by water companies), or bottled water, brought to a 'rolling' boil and left covered to cool for no more than half an hour, then follow the manufacturer's instructions on making up the feed. The use of unboiled bowser water should be avoided. The prepared feed should then be used immediately
- use cooled boiled water or bottled water for cooling the feed once it has been made up. Ready-to-use liquid formula could be used instead
- if there is no electricity or gas to allow boiling and you don't have ready-to-use liquid formula available, bottled water (table, spring or mineral water) can be used without boiling to prepare baby feeds, but the prepared feed should then be used immediately
- any bottled water supplied by your water company will comply with all drinking water standards and will be safe to use in preparing baby feed. If you buy your own bottled water, be aware that some natural mineral water may have a high sodium content. Look at the label for sodium or 'Na' and check its level is not higher than 200mg a litre. If it is, then try to use a different brand of bottled water. If no other water is available, then use this water for as short a time as possible. It is important to keep babies hydrated.

## How do I bathe my child without mains water?

If the water company has advised that the domestic supply is unsafe for drinking, then it is also inadvisable to use this for bathing infants as they may ingest some during bathing. In this situation, bottled water is a safe alternative or you can use baby wipes for hand cleansing and washing infants.

## Can I use water for my contact lenses?

Avoid putting contact lenses into water, boiled or otherwise treated as this can lead to eye infections.

© Crown copyright 2014

You may re-use this information (excluding logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v2.0. To view this licence, visit [OGL](#) or email [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk). Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned. Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to [publications@phe.gov.uk](mailto:publications@phe.gov.uk).

February 2014 Version 4