

# Public Health Information

for flood affected communities

## Health considerations for flood affected areas

With everything that is going on it can be a bit overwhelming to find the information you need, so here is some advice on how to manage clean-ups after a flood, and links to access more information. Most importantly, stay safe!

Contacts: **NSW Health, North Coast Public Health Unit** - 1300 066 055  
**PMHC Environmental Health Team** - 6581 8111

## Asbestos awareness during clean-ups

Buildings constructed before 1987 may contain asbestos and care must be taken to ensure the safety of your family and volunteers. A site assessment to identify asbestos can be undertaken by a licensed asbestos assessor, and in some cases emergency services can also do this. If you are removing under 10m<sup>2</sup> of asbestos material, refer to the asbestos guide for householders and the general public in the link below. Anything that is friable (fraying/deteriorating) or over 10m<sup>2</sup> must be removed by a licensed asbestos removalist. For further information visit **pmhc.nsw.gov.au/asbestos** or use the QR Code to the right to visit SafeWork NSW.



*SafeWork: Property hazards after storms and floods*

## Drinking water supplies

Drinking water may be affected by floods. Drinking water is water that is used for food preparation, drinking, cleaning teeth, making ice etc. If you are connected to Council's drinking water supply, please keep an eye out for boil water alerts that may be issued. These alerts will be available on council's website and Facebook page, and information will be provided to media outlets.

[pmhc.nsw.gov.au/flood-assist](https://pmhc.nsw.gov.au/flood-assist)



PORT MACQUARIE  
HASTINGS COUNCIL

If you are on tank water and your tank has been impacted by floodwater, NSW Health has developed information on how to disinfect your water supply. If you have a water bore for your drinking water supply and it has been inundated, it is recommended that you use bottled water or rainwater or boil water before use. More information is available by using the QR Code to the right.



*NSW Health:  
Rainwater tanks*

## Cleaning up

Ensure that you protect yourself when cleaning by wearing gloves and masks and allowing sufficient ventilation. Always follow the directions on the label. NSW Health has advice on cleaning specific items which is available by using the QR Codes below.



*NSW Health: Staying  
healthy after floods*



*NSW Health:  
Household clean-up  
for after a flood*



*NSW Health:  
Cleaning swimming  
pools after floods*

## Food Safety

Floodwater can be contaminated with sewage and other waste, which may make you sick. Ensure that you throw out any food that has been in contact with floodwater or has an unusual colour or odour (including frozen food). Canned food may be salvaged by removing labels from cans that are not damaged or bulging, sanitise the outside and relabel with a marker. Remember, if in doubt, throw it out.

Fridges that have lost power for more than 4 hours can spoil food. Freezers can keep food safely frozen for at least 24 hours if the door is kept shut. Food should be hard frozen. Defrosted food should not be re-frozen and thrown out instead.

Make sure that you clean and sanitise any food preparation surfaces, pots, pans and utensils. Cleaning is done with hot soapy water and sanitising is done after with chemicals or boiling to kill remaining pathogens. NSW Food Authority has advice on how to make a sanitiser using a diluted bleach solution and how to sanitise using boiling water. Do not use dishwashers that have been exposed to floodwater.



*NSW Health: Kitchen  
cleanup*

## Septic systems

If you have an Aerated Wastewater Treatment System (these are serviced quarterly by a service agent) then you may need to contact your service agent to check your pumps and electrics in the tank to ensure that they are working properly.

For all systems - if your tank and/or disposal area is waterlogged, it is recommended that you minimise water usage within your home i.e. avoid/delay using the washing machine, take shorter showers, etc. You may need to have your tank pumped out to allow your disposal area to dry out, but be careful as empty tanks may pop out of the ground if fully emptied and not anchored properly. Where tanks and disposal areas are waterlogged, it may lead to sewage surcharges from the tank, at the overflow gully or in your house. Make sure you wash hands and wear protective clothing when inspecting your septic system.



*NSW Health: Septic  
tanks in flood  
affected areas*