

News Release



MISSISSIPPI STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Communications & Public Relations

**TOPIC: Public Health Officials Issue
Health Advisories
To Safeguard Personal Health and Safety**

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Mississippi State health department officials encourage Mississippians to heed health advisories during and after the storm to ensure personal health and safety. The Health Department's mission is "to promote and protect the health of the citizens of Mississippi" through population-based programs and services. The agency's preparation, prevention, and recovery efforts during hurricanes and other natural disasters are vital in preserving the health of the state's citizens

Public health officials may issue health advisories or recommendations particular to local conditions. Anyone can contact their local county health department or the State Department of Health at 1-800-489-7670. For more information, the public can log onto the public health agency's website at www.msdh.state.ms.us

Mosquitoes

Mississippi has had mosquito-borne encephalitis cases - such as West Nile virus - which occur in late summer and early fall, concurrent with hurricane season. Although mosquito-borne diseases are usually uncommon, everyone should protect themselves from mosquitoes. Health officials encourage the public to wear clothes with long sleeves and long pants and to use insect repellants that contain DEET. If using DEET, one should read the instructions before using the mosquito repellent product. Products containing DEET are available from stores and through local and state health departments. To control mosquito populations, the public can drain all standing water left in open containers outside the home.

Boil Water Notices

The Health Department reminds everyone when their water system loses pressure, the drinking water might be contaminated. After a disaster resulting in the loss of water pressure on a system, the public should suspect that the drinking water is not safe. Boil water intended for consumption for one minute or use bottled water until notified by the water system officials or the Health Department that your water has been tested or is safe to drink.

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Anyone can use bottled water or purifying drinking water by bringing it to a rolling boil for at least one minute. Another way to purify drinking water is by adding eight drops of household bleach to one gallon of water and to continue purifying their drinking water until they have been notified by their water supplier that the water has been tested and is safe to drink.

Residents served by private water wells should take special precautions to ensure that their drinking water is safe. Sufficient drinking water should be stored in advance of an anticipated loss of power. Should a well lose pressure due to loss of power or become submerged, one must assume the water is contaminated. When power is restored, boil or treat the water with chlorine prior to drinking or washing dishes until the water has been tested and proven safe.

Floodwater Health Risks

When a hurricane or tropical storm makes landfall on the Gulf Coast, flooding usually occurs. Floodwaters may contact fecal material from overflowing sewage systems and agricultural and industrial waste. Although skin contact with floodwater does not, by itself, pose a serious health risk, there is risk of disease from eating or drinking anything contaminated with floodwater. If anyone has open cuts or sores that will be exposed to floodwater, they must keep them clean as possible by washing them with soap and applying an antibiotic ointment to discourage infection. If a wound develops redness, swelling, or drainage, seek immediate medical attention.

Parents should not allow children to play in floodwater areas or use local beach waters or bayous for recreational purposes until they have been declared safe by authorities. Children's hands should be washed frequently; children should refrain from playing with floodwater-contaminated toys that have not been disinfected.

Mold

Mold can become a problem in a home through sources of indoor moisture such as flooding, backed-up sewers, leaky roofs, and damp basement or crawl spaces. For mold to grow, it needs a source of moisture and a place to grow. Molds are simple, microscopic organisms found virtually everywhere indoors and outdoors, and when present in large quantities can cause allergic symptoms similar to those caused by plant pollen.

Health officials say it is common to find mold spores in the air of homes and growing on damp surfaces. Mold spores primarily cause health problems when they enter the air and are inhaled in large number.

Allergic reactions may be the most common health problem of mold exposure. Typical symptoms include respiratory problems, nasal and sinus congestion, eyes burning, sore throat, and skin irritation. Allergic persons vary in their sensitivities to mold, both as to amount and type need to cause reactions. People with special concerns about mold should consult a physician if they are having health problems.

One can detect mold in their home if an earthy or musty odor exists and if there is visible water damage. Anyone can look for discoloration and leaching from plaster. The simplest approach health officials offer: if anyone sees or smells mold, they have a problem. Unless the source of moisture is removed and the contaminated area is cleaned and disinfected, mold growth is likely to reoccur.

The Mississippi State Department of Health does not recommend testing as the first step to determine if someone has a mold problem. Reliable sampling for mold can be expensive and requires equipment not available to the general public. Residents of individual private homes must pay a contractor to carry out such sampling, as it is not usually done by public health agencies.

Reminder To Media:

In 1999, The Health Department produced and distributed The Hurricane Response News Media Guide to electronic and print mediums in the Hattiesburg and Gulf Coast areas. The Hurricane Response News Media Guide is a three-ring binder notebook that was personally delivered by Public Relations staff in September 1999 and given to news directors, assignment editors, health reporters, and other media representatives. We encourage you to use the emergency information provided to you. Health officials do not have the news media guide readily available, but can reproduce upon request to the Public Relations office at 601-576-7667.