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Media Release

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FLOOD CLEANUP GUIDANCE

[Portage County]— Portage County Health and Human Services is urging local residents to use caution to protect themselves and their families following the weather conditions resulting in recent flooding experienced in our area. Flood water may be contaminated with bacteria or other hazardous substances. Anyone who gets a headache, upset stomach, or flu-like symptoms after being or working in flood waters should seek immediate medical attention.

Follow these tips **during and after a flood**:

- **Do not drive through flood waters.** It takes just 12 inches of rushing water to carry away a car. When you encounter flood water, turn around, don't drown.
- **Stay out of flood waters.** Flood water can contain bacteria, sewage, sharp objects, and other dangerous items.
- **Drain basements slowly.** Basements containing standing water should be emptied gradually – no more than 2-3 inches per day. If a basement is drained too quickly, the water pressure outside the walls will be greater than the water pressure inside, which may cause the basement floor and walls to crack and collapse.
- **Shut off electrical power if you suspect damage to your home.** Even if the damage isn't easily seen, shut off electrical power, natural gas and propane tanks to avoid fire, electrocution, or explosions. Get out of the home if a gas leak is suspected. Report suspected damage to your utility provider.

Where Government Serves the Community

- **Use battery-powered lanterns to light homes rather than candles.** Candles could trigger an explosion if there is an undetectable gas leak.
- **Use generators at least 20 feet from your home.** [Generators create carbon monoxide](#). In enclosed spaces, the carbon monoxide can build up and cause sickness or death.
- **Throw out food if you can't be sure it's safe.** Throw out any refrigerated food if your power was out for four hours or more. If frozen foods still have ice crystals, they can be refrozen. Any food that was touched by floodwaters— even canned food— should be thrown out.
- **Look out for mold.** Follow the [recommended steps](#) for cleaning mold growth.

Cleaning and sanitizing

- Materials that have been in contact with flood water for two or more days may have mold growth.
- Remove items that soak up water and can't be cleaned easily like leather, paper and wood.
- Open windows and doors to get fresh air in while you use bleach. Remember to never mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner.
- Wash hard surfaces with soap and warm water, rinse with clean water, sanitize with a mixture of 1 cup unscented bleach and 5 gallons of clean water, allow to air dry.

Well water testing

Private well owners that are concerned that their well has been affected by floodwaters should assume that the well is contaminated, do not drink or bathe in contaminated well water.

Signs that a well may be contaminated include:

- Floodwaters came into contact or ran over the top of a well.
- You notice changes in the taste, smell, or color of the water.
- You have a shallow well and live near areas that have been flooded.

If you have a well that touched flood water, [follow steps to disinfect it](#). Well water test kits are available at Portage County Health and Human Services or Planning and Zoning Departments.

For more information, visit the Wisconsin Department of Health Services' [Flood Hazards and Recovery](#) page.

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