



What's in flood water?

Flood water isn't just brown in colour, it can contain a nasty mix of chemicals, debris and bacteria. It can also hide pavement curbs, uneven roads, open manhole covers, downed power cables and rubbish. The list below highlights potential dangers and will help to reinforce the message to stay out of flood water.

Flood water poses a danger of personal injury or drowning.



The force of the water

- Just 15cm (6 inches) of fast flowing water can knock a person off their feet.
- 30cm (1 foot) of moving water is enough to float the average family car.
- 60cm (2 foot) of moving water will sweep most vehicles away.
- Floating debris could also hit a person with severe force and cause injury.



A conductor of electricity

As a conductor of electricity, the risk of an electrical shock is heightened when water and electricity are in close proximity. Flood waters can damage electrical installation and wiring, and even when flood waters have subsided, mud deposits and debris can conduct electricity, making the surrounding area dangerous both during and after flooding.



Soil

Flood water can transport and contain large amounts of eroded soil, turning it brown in colour and making visibility poor.

Hidden dangers



Sharp objects e.g. nails/broken glass

Sharp objects which can impale or cut the skin, such as metal and broken glass can be carried and hidden in flood water. If unseen, these can puncture the skin, putting those that walk through flood water at risk of infection and tetanus, a serious disease of the nervous system caused by a toxin-producing bacterium.



Trip hazards

Dirty flood water can hide holes and trip hazards such as raised or open manhole covers, pavement curbs and uneven roads. This lack of visibility can make it difficult and unsafe to walk through flood water and can lead to injuries resulting from tripping or falls.



Pollutants

Floodwater is often contaminated by agricultural runoff and pesticides, raw sewage from overflowing sewage systems, petrol and oil from vehicles and hazardous industrial, medical and household chemicals from nearby buildings. These can cause widespread and long-term damage to humans, the environment and wildlife.



Disease and infection

- Flood water contaminated by pollutants poses a risk to human health, both during and after a flood. Standing water, damp buildings and soggy items can promote mould and bacteria growth.
- These toxins can trigger an allergic reaction and cause asthma to flare up.
- Swallowing contaminated flood water can cause digestive issues such as stomach pain, diarrhoea and vomiting.
- Small cuts and wounds can develop into secondary infections when exposed to bacteria in contaminated water.

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