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Southeast District Health Department Recommends Flood Recovery Procedures

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Recent and current flooding in the District's counties has prompted the Southeast District Health Department to provide guidelines for recovery from flooding.

"It is important to remember that an area that has been flooded may be contaminated with mold or sewage which can cause health risks for your family" cautioned Kay Oestmann, Director of Southeast District Health Department.

After a flood the physical devastation to an area is obvious. Health risks can persist long after the immediate danger from flood waters have passed. Flood waters can contaminate food and water supplies, create hazardous electrical shorts, gas leaks, cause dangerous structural damage, and potentially cause health problems.

If you suspect your water supply was contaminated, drink only commercially bottled water or treated water until your supply is tested and found safe. Public and rural water supplies are tested by qualified operators. If you have a private well, observe color, odor and clarity. It is better to test your water than risk drinking contaminated water. Test kits for private wells for information on how to access these call the Southeast District Health Department. 1-877-777-0424.

Discard any food that may have come into contact with flood waters. Undamaged, commercially canned foods may be saved. Contact the Health Department for guidelines. You may be able to salvage food in refrigerators or freezers that were not exposed to flood waters. Check carefully for signs of spoilage, do not refreeze any thawed meat, poultry or shellfish. Oestmann said a good rule of thumb is "When In Doubt—Throw It Out".

At no time should anyone use the flood waters for recreational swimming. Not only does this present the opportunity for drowning, but skin infections and tetanus have been associated with contact with these waters. Observe the signs posted by law enforcement and Emergency Management and comply with their expertise.

Standing waters compound the threat of West Nile Virus. Spray with insect repellent containing DEET before you go outside. Follow guidelines available through the Southeast District Health Department.

If you are involved in flood recovery or assistance, think about the last time you had a tetanus vaccination. Tetanus organisms are found in the soil and intestinal tracts of animals and humans. Transmission occurs primarily by contaminated wounds that are major or minor. If you have not had a shot in the last 5 to 10 years, or if you have injured yourself while working in the water or mud, you should consult your physician. If you have questions about tetanus and about whether you need to be immunized, call the Health Department.

Guidelines for return and recovery in flooded areas are available from the Southeast District Health Department, and also on our website: www.sedhd.org for more information call 877-777-0424