



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ensuring Safe Flood Recovery in Northern Queensland

Protecting Communities and Volunteers from Hidden Hazards.

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As communities across Northern Queensland begin the difficult task of cleaning up after severe flooding, Environmental Health Australia (EHA) is urging residents and volunteers to prioritise safety when returning to flood-affected areas.

"Floodwaters are contaminated with a mix of sewage, chemicals, petroleum products, and debris," said James Williams, President of EHA Queensland. "Exposure to these hazards can cause serious illness or injury, so proper precautions must be taken during the recovery process."

Key Flood Clean-Up Safety Measures

Anyone involved in flood recovery should wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to minimise exposure to contaminants. Recommended PPE includes:

- Waterproof boots – Avoid sneakers or thongs, as they can transfer contamination and do not protect against sharp debris.
- Heavy-duty, waterproof gloves – Cut-resistant gloves may be necessary for handling hazardous materials.
- Long-sleeved shirts and pants – Helps protect skin from contact with contaminated surfaces.
- Face masks or respirators P2/N95 – May be required in areas with mould, dust, or airborne contaminants, and especially when working with high pressure hose.
- Insect repellent and sun protection – Prevents mosquito-borne diseases and sun-related health risks.

Hygiene and Contaminant Exposure

To reduce the risk of illness:

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and clean water before eating or drinking. If unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.
- Cover all cuts and abrasions with waterproof dressings.
- Avoid direct skin contact with floodwater and mud, which may contain harmful bacteria and chemicals.

"If you suspect hazardous materials such as asbestos, industrial chemicals, or fuel contamination, do not attempt to handle them yourself," Williams advised. "Contact your local Environmental Health Officer (EHO) or a professional waste disposal service for guidance."

General Clean-Up Advice

"Floodwaters carry significant health risks, including the potential for waterborne diseases, infections like leptospirosis, melioidosis and hazardous materials that can be fatal," said Williams. "Do not take shortcuts. Safety should always come first."

The clean-up process should proceed cautiously to ensure safety:

- Start by washing mud and debris from the house, beginning at the highest point and working downward.
- Remove all wet items such as floor coverings, furniture, and bedding. Dry and clean the underlying floor before reinstalling any new materials.
- Be alert for snakes, spiders, and rodents that may have sought refuge indoors due to the flood.
- Open windows and doors during dry days to help dry out the house. Also, drain water from under the house to increase airflow and check for trapped water and mud in wall and floor cavities.
- Remove contaminated food from refrigerators and cupboards after emptying them.
- Get a licensed electrician to assess the safety of electrical systems.
- Follow the advice from state authorities regarding the safe removal of asbestos.

For more detailed advice on flood recovery and safety, visit the Queensland Government's official flood health and safety page: [Flood Health and Safety](#).

Working Together, Safely

Queenslanders are known for their resilience and willingness to help one another in times of crisis. By taking the right safety precautions, communities can recover without unnecessary health risks.

EHA encourages everyone to stay hydrated during clean-up efforts, avoid overexertion, and take regular breaks to avoid strain. "It's important not to wait until you feel thirsty to drink," Williams emphasised. "Drink plenty of fluids, stay cool during hot weather, and be careful not to overheat during recovery efforts."

Environmental Health Australia remains committed to protecting public health and supporting communities through disaster response and recovery efforts.

"We protect people from hazards in their environment!"

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