

What to Know About Water Quality During and After Storms

What happens to water quality during a storm?

Floodwater is known to carry elevated levels of bacteria and other contaminants. Contaminants in floodwaters can increase the risk of illness, such as rashes, fever, chills, ear infections, vomiting and diarrhea. Avoid contact with creeks, streams, water near storm drains and the ocean during and soon after a storm.



What causes water quality contamination during storms?

Water becomes contaminated as a result of road runoff, watershed drainage and leakage or overflows from sewer lines and onsite wastewater systems (septic tanks). Erosion and tree-fall can also introduce waterborne contaminants and hazards in the aftermath of storms.

What should I do if I am exposed to floodwater?

If you are exposed to floodwater from creeks, streams, storm drains or the ocean, avoid swallowing the water and wash exposed areas with antimicrobial soap as soon as possible.

When is it safe to go back into the ocean after a storm?

It's important to exercise caution until waterways return to steady-state conditions. **Wait 3 days** after rainfall before swimming or surfing in the ocean. *Remember: when in doubt--stay out!*

What precautions should be taken during post-flood clean-up?

- It's best to wear rubber gloves, rubber boots and goggles.
- If you do get exposed to standing water or mud, wash with antimicrobial soap.
- Wash clothes contaminated with flood water or mud in hot water and detergent before reusing them.
- Be aware of the potential for mold development and clean immediately if it appears. Wearing a mask can help reduce inhalation of mold spores.



What are County protocols for checking water quality after a storm?

The Water Quality Program will test high priority areas after the floodwaters recede. The program will test drinking water systems including private wells on an as-needed basis. There is a 24-hour turnaround time for testing water for bacterial contamination.

Testing is recommended before using water systems that:

- were compromised during the storms
- experienced a pressure loss (due to a power failure)
- are in buildings/homes that underwent flooding or extensive evacuation

*Scan for data from streams and creeks

<https://bit.ly/3iCcY2X>



My water well was flooded, how can I get my water tested?

You can request testing by contacting the Water Quality Program by phone at 831-454-4624 or by email at WaterQuality@santacruzcounty.us. They will provide sampling containers and guidance.

What actions should I take if my well was inundated during the flood?

- It is best to flush the water lines after flooding or evacuation to clear out potential contamination. You can let the water run through an outdoor spigot for 5-10 minutes, and then run cold water through the sink for a few minutes. You can also flush toilets to move the water through the system.
- If you have a well that gets flooded, visit scceh.org/NewHome/Programs/WaterResources.aspx and read the **Flooded Well Guidance** document.

How do I know if my water is safe to drink?

- Having the water tested by a certified laboratory can help to determine if the water is safe to drink. Please be aware that turnaround time for the test is 24 hours, so it is important to disinfect or boil the water until test results are available.
- If the water system has been compromised, it's best to disinfect water used for drinking and toothbrushing until test results are received. Treatment methods that are effective at disinfection include: chlorine, UV, ozone and reverse osmosis. Boiling water for one minute can reduce bacterial contamination. Make sure to cool the water before using it.



If you have any concerns about water safety, please contact the Water Quality Program by phone at 831-454-4624 or by email at WaterQuality@santacruzcounty.us.

For more information, visit:

[www.scceh.org/NewHome/Programs/WaterResources.aspx](http://scceh.org/NewHome/Programs/WaterResources.aspx)