

Flood – protect yourself from animal and insect related hazards

Community fact sheet – January 2011

When returning to a flood affected area remember that wild animals including, rodents, snakes or spiders may be trapped in your home, shed or garden.

In general:

- Avoid wild or stray animals. For advice about dealing with animals contact your local council, animal shelter or veterinarian.
- Secure all food sources to avoid attracting rodents.
- Watch out for snakes.
- Mosquitoes can breed rapidly in stagnant waters and become a nuisance.
- Pets and other animals that have died need to be removed as soon as possible. For advice on safe disposal speak to your local council or veterinarian.

Dealing with snakes

Like other residents, snakes can become displaced during a flood. As a result, they may seek shelter and food inside houses, storage sheds and other buildings.

Damaged structures and debris are more accessible to snakes.

When outdoors:

- Wear sturdy work boots and gloves, and long pants to protect your legs.
- Watch where you place your hands and feet when removing or cleaning up debris.
- If you see a snake, step back from it slowly and allow it proceed on its way. Do not touch it.
- Remove debris from around your home as soon as practically possible as it can attract rodents, lizards and insects on which snakes feed.
- Be aware of snakes that may be swimming in the water trying to get to higher ground.

When indoors:

If you find a snake in your house do not panic:

- Seek advice from someone who knows how to safely remove the snake. Contact the Department of Sustainability & Environment on 136 186 for names of the nearest licensed snake catcher.

If bitten by a snake:

- Try to remember the colour or shape of the snake to help with treatment.
- Do not wash the skin around the bite.
- Keep still and calm, and seek immediate medical attention by calling 000.
- If you cannot get to the hospital right away, apply first aid - lay or sit down with the bite below the level of your heart. Cover the bite with a clean, dry dressing or bandage and, if possible, splint the limb.
- Do not apply a tourniquet, cut the bite to release the venom or try to suck the venom out of the wound.

Spiders

If bitten by a red back spider:

- Wash the affected area well and soothe the pain with ice packs or clean iced water.
- Applying pressure is not recommended for red back spider bites and often worsens the pain.
- Seek immediate medical help.

For other spider bites:

- Wash the area with soap and water.
- Apply a cold pack if the bite is painful.
- For most spider bites, no other first aid is necessary.
- Contact your doctor if symptoms develop or persist.

- If possible, the spider should be caught for positive identification.

Discourage rodents

- Rodents carry disease and are a nuisance.
- Remove food sources and items that can provide shelter for rodents.
- Wash dishes and cooking utensils immediately after use.
- Dispose of garbage and debris as soon as practically possible.
- Lay rodent baits or traps.

Avoid mosquitoes

- In Victoria, some mosquitoes can carry diseases such as Ross River virus or Barmah Forest virus, which can be passed onto people through mosquito bites.
- Rain and flooding may lead to an increase in mosquito numbers as water subsides and pools form.

Things to do to avoid mosquito bites:

- Protect yourself from mosquitoes.
- Wear long pants, socks, long-sleeved shirts and apply an insect repellent, containing N, N-Diethylm-toluamide (DEET) or pircaridin to your skin.
- Follow directions on the repellent's product label.
- Take care when using repellants on small children. Avoid parts of children's hands that may touch the eyes or mouth.

To help control mosquito populations around your home:

- If practical, drain water left standing outdoors in open containers such as flowerpots, unused tins, tyres or buckets.
- Change your pet's drinking water on a regular basis.

Flies

- Carry disease and are a nuisance.
- If food and garbage builds up, this becomes a breeding ground for flies.
- Clean up food wastes as soon as practically possible.

For further information

If you have been bitten or injured by an animal or insect seek advice from your doctor.

For information about licensed snake catchers contact the Department of Sustainability & Environment Customer Information Centre on 136 186.

Other public health flood fact sheets

Additional sheets regarding public health and floods can be downloaded from the Environmental Health Unit webpage at:

http://www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/emergency_mgmt/flood.htm.

Information on bites and stings, spiders is also available from the Better Health Channel at <http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/>

References

Protect Yourself from Animal and Insect related Hazards After a Natural Disaster (2005) Centres for Disease Control & Prevention, Department of Health & Human Services, USA.

Dealing with Snakes After a Storm or Flood (2002) North Carolina State University & US Department of Agriculture.

Mosquitoes can carry diseases (2007) Better Health Channel, Victoria
<http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/>

Bites and stings: first aid (2007) Better Health Channel, Victoria
<http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/>