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HOOSIERS REMINDED OF HEALTH RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH FLOODING

INDIANAPOLIS—State health officials caution Hoosiers to be aware of potential health risks in flood-affected areas of the state and to take steps to protect their health and safety. People should not drink floodwater, which could be contaminated with raw sewage, and should avoid getting floodwater in the eyes, nose, and mouth. Children should never swim or play in floodwaters.

Untreated sanitary waste can end up in waterways and on streets when heavy rain overwhelms sewer systems and treatment plants. Wells and cisterns may also be affected. Wells that are located in a flooded area should be assumed to be contaminated. Health officials recommend people discontinue use of the well water until it can be inspected by a professional well contractor. Even when the water recedes, E. coli and other pathogens remain present in pools of standing water.

Other potential hazards related to flooding include slippery conditions, poor visibility, floating debris, and downed, live wires which can cause electrical shock. In addition, small cuts or scratches on the skin can make someone more susceptible to diseases like tetanus, E. coli, and other pathogens.

“It’s extremely important for people in flooded areas to exercise caution with any type of injury,” said State Health Commissioner Gregory Larkin, M.D. “People should thoroughly wash any cuts, scrapes, scratches, or other skin injuries with soap and water and apply an antiseptic and bandages to make sure they do not become infected. Injuries exposed to floodwater and debris should be closely watched for signs of infection like redness, swelling, pain, and drainage. If any of those symptoms develop, please see your health care provider right away.”

Individuals who experience a puncture wound or a wound contaminated with feces, soil, or saliva, should visit their physician or local health department to determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary based on individual records. Specific recommendations for vaccinations should be made on a case-by-case basis.

Tetanus is an acute, often fatal disease. Symptoms of tetanus include generalized rigidity and painful spasms of skeletal muscles. The muscle stiffness usually involves the jaw (lockjaw) and neck and then becomes more generalized. Any type of wound, major or minor, could be an entry source for the tetanus organism.

Tetanus vaccines are available from your primary health care provider, local hospital, or your local health department. A complete listing of local health departments is available on the State Department of Health website at www.statehealth.in.gov by clicking on “Local Health Department Information.”

Residents of flood-affected areas are reminded to disconnect electrical appliances if possible. Do not attempt to disconnect electrical appliances while wet or standing in water.

For more flood safety and sanitization recommendations, visit the Indiana State Department of Health website at <http://www.in.gov/isdh/20401.htm>.

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