

The health effects of flooding

The damaging consequences of flooding are not only limited to your property and possessions but can also have lasting impacts on your health and wellbeing. Your physical and mental health may be affected during and after flooding and studies have shown that stress may continue for a long time after the water has receded. It is important to be aware that the impact on health is often not immediately obvious.

Injuries and illness, the anxiety caused through being involved in a flood, disruption to healthcare services and the effect of being displaced from your home and local area can all take their toll on your wellbeing and can affect anyone.

Flooding can affect people of all ages and while most go on to recover with the support of their families, friends and local community, for others the longer-term, indirect effects on their health, relationships and welfare can be far reaching.

There are actions you can take to prepare for flooding and practical ways to mitigate the health risks associated with flooding. If you have any concerns about your physical or mental health, contact your GP in the first instance or [NHS 24](#).

Be prepared

You are the first line of defence against flooding. Being prepared is an easy step you can take to safeguard your and your family's health and welfare.

- Floodline is there to help 24 hours a day with information and support to help you prepare for flooding. Sign up to Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or [online](#) to receive advance notice of when and where flooding might happen.
- Prepare a family flood kit and keep this in a handy place. The kit should include a torch, first aid kit (including waterproof plasters), warm and waterproof shoes and clothing, supplies of prescription medicines, antibacterial wipes, bottled water, food, rubber gloves, children's supplies, pet supplies, insurance details, portable radio with spare batteries and a bag or rucksack in case of evacuation.
- Prepare a flood plan so everyone knows what to do and how to keep in touch in the event of a flood.
- Keep an up-to-date list of useful contact numbers, including your GP's surgery and NHS 24.

Physical health

Flooding poses many risks to human health however there are simple actions you can take to minimise this.

- Wear warm, dry clothing to reduce the risk of hypothermia
- Avoid coming into direct contact with flood water as it may be contaminated with sewage and other pollutants
- Don't assume tap water is safe to drink: use either bottled or boiled water for drinking and food preparation purposes. Take advice from Scottish Water before turning water supplies back on.
- Anyone with a private water supply should consider whether it could be contaminated and businesses will need to contact their licensed water provider.
- Wash your hands regularly to get rid of harmful bugs. Use cooled boiled water or bottled water and soap, then rinse and dry your hands. If clean water is not available use disposable wet wipes and antibacterial gel.
- Keep cuts and grazes clean and prevent them being exposed to floodwater; use waterproof plasters.
- Do not put yourself and others at risk of injury by walking or driving through flood water – six inches of fast flowing water can knock you off your feet and less than a meter of water can float a car.
- Internal and external flooding can result in hazards below the surface you cannot see that could cause injury e.g. nails, broken glass, debris and displaced manhole covers.
- Do not allow children to play in or near flood water and encourage them to wash their hands regularly following the advice above.
- Don't eat garden vegetables covered by flood water. Leave undamaged vegetables in the ground for at least 2-3 weeks and only use after thorough washing and cooking.
- Dispose of all food, including tins, that has come into contact with flood water as it could be contaminated.
- If you feel unwell contact your GP surgery or [NHS 24](https://www.nhs.uk)

Mental health - adults

Flooding and its consequences can have wide ranging effects on different age groups and everyone will react in a unique way. Some people may require assistance and support over an extended period of time to recover from their experiences.

Symptoms can include:

- insomnia
- alcohol and substance misuse
- anxiety disorders
- phobias
- adjustment disorder
- depression
- post-traumatic stress disorder

Mental health - children and young people

Research has shown that children and young people can suffer from mental ill-health following a flood and they may display different symptoms to adults. Symptoms can include:

- separation anxiety
- irregular sleeping patterns / nightmares
- behavioural problems e.g. becoming withdrawn, increased aggression, bedwetting
- development of habit forming behaviours such as routines / rituals about washing
- academic performance may suffer

The effects of being separated from family and friends, disruption to family life and daily routine and the loss of pets and possessions can all have a dramatic effect on children and can be ongoing. The possibility of having to move to temporary accommodation and the change this will bring to lifestyle can also add to stress and anxiety. Support is available from a number of organisations who can provide information on coping and accessing additional support; the first point of call is your GP.

Useful contact information

Your local GP's surgery

Your GP is your first point of call if you feel unwell and need advice.

NHS 24

To look up symptoms online and for out of hours advice when GP practices are closed. Calls to NHS 24 are free from both landlines and mobile phones.

www.nhs24.com

Telephone: 111 (24 hours a day, 7 days)

Living Life

Living Life is a free telephone service available to anyone over the age of 16 who is suffering from low mood, mild to moderate depression and/or anxiety.

You can access Living Life either by a GP referral or phoning the free, confidential phone line.

Call: 0800 328 9655 (Mon-Fri 1pm to 9pm).

Breathing Space

Breathing Space is a free, confidential phone and web based service for any individual in Scotland experiencing low mood, depression or who is unusually worried and in need of someone to talk to.

It is staffed by trained specialist advisors who have the relevant experience required to assist callers with their problems and provide a safe and supportive space by listening, offering advice and information. Breathing Space is funded by the Scottish Government Health Department and [NHS 24](#).

Call: 0800 83 85 87 (Friday 6pm – Monday 6am and Monday – Thursday 6pm to 2am).

Visit: www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk

YoungMinds

YoungMinds helpline service is for parents and carers worried about a child or young person; the service does not offer advice directly to young people. It is free to call from mobiles and landlines.

Call: 0808 802 5544 (Monday to Friday 9.30am-4pm)

Visit: www.youngminds.org.uk/for_parents/parent_helpline

Email parents@youngminds.org.uk

SAMH

The Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) is Scotland's leading mental health charity and can offer advice, support and literature and downloads

Call: 0141 530 1000

Visit: www.samh.org.uk



Samaritans

If you are feeling distressed, in a state of despair, suicidal or need emotional support you can contact Samaritans. Your call will be free and confidential and will be taken by a trained Samaritans volunteer. The phone line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call: 08457 90 90 90

Visit: www.samaritans.org

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Scottish Flood Forum

The Scottish Flood Forum is a Scottish based charitable organisation that represents and provides support those who are affected by, or are at risk of, flooding. They are funded by the Scottish Government and can provide advice, help and information on dealing with the effects of flooding.

Call: 01698 839021

Visit: www.scottishfloodforum.org

