

Summary Sheet

Date: May 25, 2011

Subject: Take care to prevent disease during floods

Summary:

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services is reminding the public that flood waters commonly contain microbes that can cause illness, and care should be taken by those affected by recent flooding to prevent infection.

“Anyone who is involved in clean-up after a flood should make sure their tetanus immunization is current,” DPHHS Director Anna Whiting Sorrell said.

Puncture wounds or wounds contaminated with feces or soil should be examined by a doctor or health department to determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary based on individual records. It is also a good idea to make sure other immunizations are current as well.

DPHHS is not recommending Hepatitis A vaccination as a response to flooding in Montana. According to Jim Murphy of the DPHHS Public Health and Safety Division, requests have been made by some Montana residents for Hepatitis A vaccination. “Hepatitis A is not common enough in Montana or the US to present a threat during flooding,” said Murphy. “Although Hepatitis A vaccine is very effective and is recommended, there is no need for Montanans to worry about Hepatitis A infection during flooding events.”

During flooding, basic hand washing is also critical to prevent disease. Be sure to wash your hands before cooking, eating, caring for someone who is sick, after using the toilet, after touching garbage, and after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose. Keep your hands clean by washing your hands with soap in clean, running water. If your tap water is not safe to use, wash hands with soap in water that has been boiled or from another clean water source.

These simple measures can help protect you and others from illness during a flood.

For those whose homes are affected by floods, the Montana Departments of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) have compiled a list of tips for dealing with flood conditions. These tips are available online at both www.deq.mt.gov and www.dphhs.mt.gov.