

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**For More Information Contact**

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## **HEALTH DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDS PRECAUTIONS TO RESIDENTS WITH WELLS AND SEPTIC SYSTEMS**

(CHRISTIANSBURG, Va.) — The Virginia Department of Health urges residents with wells and septic systems to take extra precautions following recent heavy rains. Floodwaters may contain sewage and agricultural or industrial waste. Eating or drinking anything that has come into contact with contaminated water can increase the risk of disease.

### **Wells**

People who rely on private wells for their drinking water should consider their well contaminated if it was flooded or even potentially flooded. Well water should not be consumed until bacteriological testing indicates the well is not contaminated. If it's possible your well was flooded, use another water source until the safety of the well is confirmed. Disinfect the well by adding household bleach mixed with water to the well. The recommended amount of bleach varies, but a half-gallon of unscented bleach should be adequate for most home wells. To be certain that your water lines have been disinfected, turn on the faucets until the chlorine smell is detected then turn them off and allow the bleach to sit in the well for at least four hours, or overnight. Then turn the water on until the chlorine smell dissipates.

The well water must then be tested to confirm that the chlorine has destroyed harmful bacteria. Heavy or continuous contamination may require more than one chlorine treatment. Until the well is confirmed to be safe, use bottled water or water that has been boiled for a minimum of one minute for drinking, brushing teeth or cooking or preparing food.

### **Septic Systems**

Flooding can damage onsite sewage systems. Be sure to check to determine if erosion or damage has occurred. If any part of the system is exposed or appears damaged, contact your local health department. Flooded septic systems also can back up into the home and raw sewage can cause disease. When cleaning up be sure to wear gloves, disinfect contaminated surfaces with diluted bleach and water and thoroughly wash yourself and your clothing immediately after cleaning.

If the septic system has a pump chamber and pump, make sure surface water has not leaked into the system. Excess water can overload and damage a drainfield. After heavy rains, saturated soils around a drainfield may cause a septic system to process sewage more slowly, and it may take

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several days for the soils to dry out and the system to return to normal. Under these conditions, simply pumping the tank may not solve the problem, as water may simply flow back into the septic tank.

For more information, contact a plumbing or septic system contractor, your local health department (listed below) or visit the Virginia Department of Emergency Management website at [www.vaemergency.com](http://www.vaemergency.com) or the Virginia Department of Health website at [www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov).

- Alleghany Health District, 540-283-5050;
- Central Shenandoah Health District, 540-332-7830;
- Central Virginia Health District, 434-947-6781;
- Cumberland Plateau Health District, 276-889-7621;
- Lenowisco Health District, 276-328-8000;
- Mount Rogers Health District, 276-781-7450;
- New River Health District, 540-381-7100;
- Pittsylvania/Danville Health District, 434-799-5190;
- Roanoke City Health District, 540-283-5050; or
- West Piedmont Health District, 276-638-2311.

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