

# Risk Communication Toolkit for Flooding



Developed for Oregon Local Health Departments by the  
Oregon Health Authority, Public Health Division  
Health Security, Preparedness, and Response Program

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Risk Communication Toolkit for Flooding has been designed to assist with messaging during and after a flooding event. The most likely health impacts from a flooding emergency include the following:

- drinking water contamination
- private well flooding
- carbon monoxide poisoning
- home reentry and salvage
- power outages and food safety
- injury prevention

In order to effectively and efficiently utilize the communication materials included in this Toolkit, the following items from your county's or tribe's communication plan are necessary:

- Media Contact List
- Local Partners Contact List
- Special Populations List
- Policies for Clearance
- Policies for Disseminating Messages

Also, for resources specific to flooding, please refer to your local health department's emergency operations plan.

## KEY MESSAGES FOR FLOODING

The Crisis Phase is characterized by uncertainty, shortened response time, and intense media interest. The public is seeking timely and accurate facts about what happened, where it happened, and what is being done to address the crisis. They will question the magnitude of the crisis, the immediacy of the threat to them, the duration of the threat, and who is going to fix it.

Communicators should be prepared to answer these questions as quickly, accurately, and fully as possible. Simplicity, credibility, verifiability, consistency, and speed count when communicating in the initial phases of an emergency.



**Goal: Provide up-to-date and accurate information to empower decision-making and prompt action**

- Provide available information on current event
- Explain the risks of this hazard
- Provide self-efficacy messages about safety and how and where to get more information
- Explain the process of what your local health department is doing

## TALKING POINTS FOR FLOODING

### What to do during a flood

- **Injury Prevention:** Stay out of flood waters. Even the strongest swimmers can drown in flood waters. Do not drive through standing water. Never make contact with power lines or objects that are in contact with power lines. Wear eye protection when cleaning up storm debris.
- **Water:** Check for local boil-water advisories. Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush teeth, prepare food, make ice or make baby formula.
- **Well water:** If your well has been affected by flood waters, it is recommended that you boil your water for at least one minute at a rolling boil, or purchase water from a safe source. Before resuming normal use of the well, have the water tested for possible bacteria and pollutants.
- **Foods:** Do not eat foods that have come in contact with flood waters. Throw away food that cannot be kept cold or properly heated due to lack of power.
- **Carbon monoxide poisoning:** Don't use a generator, pressure washer, charcoal grill, camp stove, or other gasoline- or charcoal-burning device inside your home, basement, or garage or near a window, door, or vent. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas. If carbon monoxide poisoning is suspected, seek fresh air and consult with a health care professional right away.
- **Home safety:** If there is standing water in your home, never turn power on or off yourself – contact an electrician.
- **First aid:** Immediately clean all wounds with soap and clean water. If your skin or eyes come in contact with hazardous materials wash thoroughly with decontaminated water. Avoid getting cut because cuts can lead to tetanus. If possible, make sure your tetanus vaccination is up to date.
- **Mold:** Remove mold by washing with soap and water and letting surfaces dry completely. Some materials such as moldy clothing, ceiling tiles and sheet rock may have to be replaced. If mold-related illness is suspected, consult a health care professional.

## SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE FOR FLOODING

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media contact: [Name], [Phone], [Email]  
[Health Department or other Website]

#### **Oregon Public Health gives tips for staying healthy and safe during winter storms**

[City, State] - Several Oregon counties have experienced flooding due to the winter storms that moved into the area earlier this week. Oregon Health Authority's Public Health Division wants to offer simple tips on how Oregonians can stay safe and healthy during inclement weather.

"The floods this week will leave devastation behind them, and people will want to clean up and repair their homes and communities as soon as possible so they can move forward with their lives and livelihoods. Some simple precautions can help protect their health as they do so," said [Insert spokesperson information here].

Some tips to be safe during and after the storm:

- **Injury Prevention:** Stay out of flood waters. Even the strongest swimmers can drown in flood waters. Do not drive through standing water. Never make contact with power lines or objects that are in contact with power lines. Wear eye protection when cleaning up storm debris.
- **Water:** Check for local boil-water advisories. Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush teeth, prepare food, make ice or make baby formula.
- **Well water:** If your well has been affected by flood waters, it is recommended that you boil your water for at least one minute at a rolling boil, or purchase water from a safe source. Before resuming normal use of the well, have the water tested for possible bacteria and pollutants.
- **Foods:** Do not eat foods that have come in contact with flood waters. Throw away food that cannot be kept cold or properly heated due to lack of power.
- **Carbon monoxide poisoning:** Don't use a generator, pressure washer, charcoal grill, camp stove, or other gasoline- or charcoal-burning device inside your home, basement, or garage or near a window, door, or vent. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas. If carbon monoxide poisoning is suspected, seek fresh air and consult with a health care professional right away.
- **Home safety:** If there is standing water in your home, never turn power on or off yourself – contact an electrician.
- **First aid:** Immediately clean all wounds with soap and clean water. If your skin or eyes come in contact with hazardous materials wash thoroughly with

decontaminated water. Avoid getting cut because cuts can lead to tetanus. If possible, make sure your tetanus vaccination is up to date.

- **Mold:** Remove mold by washing with soap and water and letting surfaces dry completely. Some materials such as moldy clothing, ceiling tiles and sheet rock may have to be replaced. If mold-related illness is suspected, consult a health care professional.

For more information about injury prevention, food safety, wells, drinking water, and carbon monoxide during and after flooding, go to [public.health.oregon.gov](http://public.health.oregon.gov).

###

## **FACT SHEETS FOR FLOODING**

The following fact sheets are available for download. If your agency needs these documents in additional formats, please contact your [preparedness or hospital liaison](#).

### **Preventing Carbon Monoxide Poisoning After an Emergency**

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/Prepare/Documents/OHA8632CarbonMonoxidefactsheet.pdf>

### **Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency**

[http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/Prepare/Documents/OHA8631\\_2013\\_Food\\_Safety\\_after\\_an%20Emergency.pdf](http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/Prepare/Documents/OHA8631_2013_Food_Safety_after_an%20Emergency.pdf)

### **Making Drinking Water Safe During Floods**

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Documents/OHA8629Drinkingwaterduringfloods.pdf>

### **Private well flooding**

[http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Documents/OHA8630\\_Privatewellflooding\\_Final.pdf](http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Documents/OHA8630_Privatewellflooding_Final.pdf)

### **Mold prevention after a flood** (*CDC Resource*)

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protect.asp>

## **PUBLIC HEALTH WEBPAGES FOR FLOODING**

### **Oregon Public Health Flooding Webpage**

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/Prepare/Pages/PrepareForFlooding.aspx>

### **Oregon Public Health Carbon Monoxide Webpage**

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Pages/CarbonMonoxidePoisoning.aspx>

### **Oregon Public Health Food and Water After a Flood Webpage**

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Pages/FoodWaterSafety.aspx>

### **Oregon Public Health Home Reentry and Salvage Webpage**

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Pages/HomeSafetyReentry.aspx>

### **Oregon Public Health Injury Prevention After a Flood Webpage**

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Pages/InjuryPrevention.aspx>

### **Oregon Public Health Current Hazards Webpage**

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Events/Pages/index.aspx>

## **SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES FOR FLOODING**

### **Twitter Messages**

*The following messages can be posted on your local health agency's Twitter feed. All posts are 140 or fewer characters.*

*In addition to the suggestions below, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's @CDCReady and @CDCEmergency feeds can be retweeted as relevant information and links are tweeted.*

Learn how to prevent disease, illness, and injury before, during, and after a #ORflood. <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/alldisasters.asp>

For up to date information on current hazards in Oregon: <http://tinyurl.com/4noj5zf> #ORflood

Interested in the current flood stage in your area? <http://www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/rfc>

Did you know you can get the latest severe weather updates on your smartphone? Find out how: <http://tinyurl.com/865oo9a>

#ORflood expected to continue. Do you have all the necessary supplies? <http://tinyurl.com/opt6cyv>

High water happens. Be safe: <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/water/tadd/> #ORflood

Staying warm and dry by the fire? Be sure to check your carbon monoxide detector! <http://tinyurl.com/o4lhg2c> #ORflood

Power outages reported across Oregon. Is your food safe? <http://tinyurl.com/p9j6rl1> #ORflood

Has your county set up a severe weather shelter? To find out, contact 211info: <http://211info.org>

Evacuations are quickly becoming a reality for some Oregonians. If you are in an at-risk area, pack a bag and be ready to go! #ORflood

Make sure you know your evacuation route. Check road conditions before you travel <http://www.Tripcheck.com>

Don't leave your emergency kit behind when you evacuate, you worked so hard to put it together! #ORflood

Follow @TripCheck for the latest road and weather information for state highways. Learn more at <http://www.Tripcheck.com>

Avoid moving water, regardless of depth or speed. Do not drive on flooded roads. Cars can be swept away for break down. #ORflood

### **Facebook Posts**

*All of the above tweets can be cross posted as Facebook messages, but the following suggestions have images and links that can also be posted. For more suggestions, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/cdcemergency> to repost useful links, webpages, photos, and tips.*

Did you know that you can get the latest weather updates from your smartphone? Mobile users will receive a text message if you are entering a storm area. Find out if your phone receives wireless emergency alerts from the Commercial Mobile Alert System: [http://www.ctia.org/consumer\\_info/safety/index.cfm/AID/12082](http://www.ctia.org/consumer_info/safety/index.cfm/AID/12082)

Want to know if your morning commute has been impacted by bad weather? Visit Trip Check to get the latest road conditions: <http://www.tripcheck.com/Pages/RCmap.asp?curRegion=0&mainNav=RoadConditions>

If you are out driving during a storm warning, remember two feet of water can carry away most cars. Don't drive through floodwaters. Learn more safety tips at <http://public.health.oregon.gov>

We are seeing a lot of pictures on Facebook of flood conditions. Remember: Flood water is very cold! Dress warmly and wear proper boots when venturing out! Six inches of fast-moving water can knock over most adults. Learn more safety tips at <http://public.health.oregon.gov>

Heavy rains expected to continue. Do you know what to do if the power goes out? Is your emergency kit ready to go? Do you have all the necessary supplies? Build an emergency kit on budget today. Learn what you can do to prepare today: <http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/Prepare/Pages/BuidKit.aspx>

Winter weather and flooding can cause power outages. Call your local power company to report outages. If you use a generator, make sure to place it outside the home. Incorrect generator use can lead to CO poisoning from the toxic engine exhaust, electric shock, or electrocution and fire.

Are you still in a storm warning? Get the latest weather updates from the NWS Oregon Facebook page. <http://www.facebook.com/US.NationalWeatherService.Portland.gov>

## KEY MESSAGES FOR FLOODING RECOVERY

During the Recovery phase, information focuses on clean up, mitigation, recovery, and rebuilding efforts. Health risks to the public may also change during this phase. Communication and education efforts should focus more heavily on new or emerging risks and actions to mitigate those risks.



**Goal: Provide information about ongoing cleanup, mitigation, recovery, and rebuilding efforts**

- Increase public understanding of new and emerging risks
- Provide information and actions for risk avoidance behaviors and response behaviors
- Use the event as a “teachable moment” to highlight future preparedness messages

## **SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE FOR FLOODING RECOVERY**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Media contact: [Name], [Phone], [Email]  
[Health Department or other Website]

#### **Important Information following the Recent Winter Storms**

[City, State] – The recent winter storms have left devastation behind them, but Oregonians are resilient. Many people have started cleaning up and repairing their homes and communities. The Oregon Public Health Division would like to offer simple precautions that can help protect the health and safety of Oregonians.

#### **One of the most important safety tips is to stay out of flood waters.**

- One thing people might not think about is the temperature of the water. Oregon water is extremely cold and can cause a condition called “cold shock.” Cold shock can cause a person’s breathing and heart to shut down. Even strong swimmers have died before swimming 100 yards in cold water. Again, please stay out of the water.
- If people have to walk in flood waters (for example our first responders or public works staff), make sure to wear sturdy shoes. Remember that sharp objects can penetrate rubber boots. Injuries to the feet and hands are the most common during flood clean up.
- Also people should be mindful of still water. Although still water may look harmless, there may be currents, which can cause falls, other injuries and even drowning.
- Most people don’t realize that as little as six inches of water may cause a person to lose control of a car or truck. And two feet of water will carry most cars away. So, when driving if you approach a flooded road, turn around. Do not try to cross.
- Before heading out, motorists should check Oregon’s Department of Transportation’s Trip Check website. ODOT updates Trip Check in real time, so motorists can get the latest information on road conditions. The recent floods have made many roads impassable.

#### **As Oregonians begin to head back into their homes to clean, we want to make sure they avoid preventable injuries.**

- For example, the high winds on the coast caused many trees to fall or break. As people head out to cut down those branches and limbs, there is often an increase in chain saw accidents. The Public Health Division encourages people to wear safety glasses and heavy work gloves. Remember to always cut at waist level or

below. With an electric chain saw, use extreme caution to avoid electrical shock. Avoid contact with power lines.

- Electric shock is another common preventable injury. Never turn power on or off while standing in water. If electrical circuits and electrical equipment have gotten wet or are in or near water, turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel. If you must enter standing water to access the main power switch, then call an electrician to turn it off.
- Carbon monoxide poisoning is another common injury associated with flooding. Carbon monoxide is a colorless, odorless gas. If people have experienced a power outage, they might be using a generator, which produces carbon monoxide. Generators should be placed outside the home—not in the home, basement, or garage. Sometimes people think putting the generator near a window, door, or vent is ok, but that too can cause carbon monoxide poisoning. The best advice is to keep that generator outside of your home.

**As Oregonians begin to head back into their homes to clean, we want to make sure they know how to remove mold.**

- Some homeowners had to evacuate their homes last week. If your home has been flooded and has been closed up for several days, it is likely that the house is contaminated with mold. The best first step is to dry out the flooded area.
- Use fans and dehumidifiers to remove excess moisture as soon as possible. Weather permitting; open the windows and doors to ventilate the room.
- Once the house has been dried out, remove mold from hard surfaces by washing with soap and water and letting all washed surfaces dry completely. Bleach can be used and people should follow all label instructions, paying special attention to the precautionary statements and dilution rate.

**These safety tips and others are available on our website: [public.health.oregon.gov](http://public.health.oregon.gov). Click on the yellow banner on the top of the page.**

###

## TALKING POINTS FOR FLOODING RECOVERY

### **One of the most important safety tips is to stay out of flood waters.**

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- Some homeowners had to evacuate their homes last week. If your home has been flooded and has been closed up for several days, it is likely that the house is contaminated with mold. The best first step is to dry out the flooded area.
- Use fans and dehumidifiers to remove excess moisture as soon as possible. Weather permitting; open the windows and doors to ventilate the room.
- Once the house has been dried out, remove mold from hard surfaces by washing with soap and water and letting all washed surfaces dry completely. Bleach can be used and people should follow all label instructions, paying special attention to the precautionary statements and dilution rate.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA MESSAGES FLOODING RECOVERY**

### **Twitter Messages**

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*In addition to the suggestions below, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's @CDCReady and @CDCEmergency feeds can be retweeted as relevant information and links are tweeted.*

After flooding, water may contain contaminants or other debris. Protect yourself and loved ones: <http://tinyurl.com/noj5hdr>

Did your #wellflood? Be sure to boil water before drinking, washing food, making ice, gargling, eye washing, or brushing teeth. <http://tinyurl.com/p9j6rll>

When in doubt, throw it out! Learn more about food safety after a flood: <http://tinyurl.com/p9j6rll>

Is your food safe after a power outage? <http://tinyurl.com/p9j6rll>

Is your well-flooded? No need to boil water before bathing, doing dishes, laundry, cleaning, hand washing, and pet or plant water. #ORFlood

Got questions about mold? Check out this information about safety, clean up, much more: <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/>

Be safe when using chainsaws for downed tree removal: <http://tinyurl.com/p5w2dtm>

As waters recede, re-entering your home is not always an easy task. Check out these tips on home re-entry. <http://tinyurl.com/noj5hdr>

If there is standing water in your home, never turn power on or off yourself - contact an electrician. <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/electrical.asp> #ORFlood

For tips on cleaning your home after a flood <http://tinyurl.com/noj5hdr>

Steps for sanitizing your kitchen after a flood. Be food smart: <http://tinyurl.com/7fsw28m>

The best way to remove mold from your home and car after a flood

<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/pdf/flyer-get-rid-of-mold.pdf>

Be careful when removing debris. Metal debris and other sharp objects can sometimes lead to deep cuts. <http://tinyurl.com/cq5urvw>

Prevent or treat wounds from the flooding and during clean up

<http://tinyurl.com/cq5urvw>

Need help with disaster recovery? Oregon Disaster Recovery Assistance Guidebook

[http://www.oregon.gov/OMD/OEM/Pages/fin\\_rec/disaster\\_recover\\_guide.aspx](http://www.oregon.gov/OMD/OEM/Pages/fin_rec/disaster_recover_guide.aspx)

Time to restock your disaster kits! If you don't have one yet, now is a great time to get started! <http://tinyurl.com/nocthwn>

Did your family have a disaster plan in place? How did it work? Improve your current plan or make a new one! <http://tinyurl.com/qakgab3>

Resilience isn't just how you respond to a disaster, it is how you prepare!

<http://tinyurl.com/qakgab3>

### **Facebook Posts**

*A benefit to posting on Facebook is that conversations can be had among fans (although this can require additional moderation).*

*All of the above tweets can be cross posted as Facebook messages, but the following suggestions have images and links that can also be posted. For more suggestions, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/cdcemergency> to repost useful links, webpages, photos, and tips.*

Ever heard of the phrase “adding insult to injury”? Well, in the case of a disaster, adding injury can make everything ten times worse. Check out the link below and learn about basic tips to keeping yourself and your family safe after a disaster.

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Pages/InjuryPrevention.aspx>

[x](#)

Ready to go home? Follow this link to find out everything you need to know about home re-entry after a flood.

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Pages/HomeSafetyReentry.aspx>

[x](#)

Cleaning around your home after a flood can be a disaster of its own. Debris can have sharp edges, leading to scrapes, cuts, and risk for tetanus. Learn more at:

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Pages/InjuryPrevention.aspx>

[x](#)

Water, water everywhere but is it safe to drink? Check out this resource from OHA

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Pages/FoodWaterSafety.aspx>

[x](#)

Well water can be contaminated during floods. Be sure to boil water for consumption activities. If available, bottled water is recommended – even for brushing your teeth.

Learn more safety tips at

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Pages/FoodWaterSafety.aspx>

If your home was without power, your food may be at risk. Perishable foods can rapidly grow bacteria when kept at improper temperatures. Educate yourself on proper food storage and health risks of food after a flood.

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Pages/FoodWaterSafety.aspx>

Water and mold are a match made in heaven. Before you head home or start your clean up, take a look at the information posted at the link below to find out about the types of mold, health implications of exposure, and safe clean up suggestions.

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/healthyenvironments/environmentalexposures/toxicsubstances/pages/mold.aspx>

Did you know that Carbon Monoxide is tasteless, colorless, and odorless? Carbon Monoxide leaks are common in homes and businesses that have been affected by floods. Learn more about the signs and symptoms of Carbon Monoxide poisoning and how to prevent leaks from happening in your home or business.

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/CurrentHazards/Pages/carbonmonoxidepoisoning.aspx>

Chain saws can be great labor saving tools to clear debris after a disaster. But, if not operated properly and with respect, they can quickly cause severe injury and death. Visit the site below for more safety information on chain saw operation.

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/Preparedness/CurrentHazards/Pages/InjuryPrevention.aspx#chainsaw>

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