

# Fact Sheet

# Floods

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Flood effects can be local, impacting a neighborhood or community, or very large, affecting entire river basins and multiple states. Some floods develop slowly, sometimes over a period of days. Flash floods can develop quickly, sometimes in just a few minutes or without any visible signs of rain.

According to the National Hurricane Center, inland flooding has been responsible for more than half the deaths associated with tropical cyclones in the United States in the last 30 years. Be aware of flood hazards no matter where you live, but especially if you live in a low-lying area, near water or downstream from a dam. Every state is at risk from this hazard.

## Know Your Risk and What to Do

- Contact your local emergency management office to learn about evacuation routes and emergency plans.
- Get additional information from the Federal Emergency Management Agency ([www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)), the American Red Cross ([www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)) and NOAA's National Weather Service ([www.nws.noaa.gov](http://www.nws.noaa.gov)).
- Buy flood insurance. Anyone can get flooded, even if you don't live in a designated flood zone. Homeowners insurance does not cover flood damage. There is a 30-day waiting period before activation of flood insurance policies. Ask your insurance agent right away or go to [www.floodsmart.gov](http://www.floodsmart.gov).
- Inquire about emergency plans and procedures at your child's school and at your workplace.
- Make a family disaster plan that includes out-of-town contacts and locations to reunite if you become separated. Be sure everyone knows home, work and cell phone numbers, and how to call 9-1-1.
- Assemble a 3-day disaster supplies kit with food, water, medical supplies, battery-powered radio and NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards, batteries, flashlights, and other items. For more information about assembling a disaster supplies kit, visit [www.fema.gov/areyouready/](http://www.fema.gov/areyouready/).
- Gather important documents such as birth and marriage certificates, Social Security cards, passports, wills, deeds, and financial and insurance records. Store them in a fire and flood safe location or safe deposit box.

## Prepare Your Home Before the Flood

- Avoid building in a floodplain. If you are in a floodplain elevate and reinforce your home.
- Elevate the furnace, water heater, and electric panel if susceptible to flooding.
- Install "check valves" in sewer traps to prevent flood water from backing up into the drains of your home.
- Construct barriers (levees, berms, floodwalls) to stop floodwater from entering the building.
- Seal walls in basements with waterproofing compounds to avoid seepage.
- Plan ahead for the protection of pets and livestock. For information, go to [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) and search "caring for animals," or visit The Humane Society of the United States at [www.hsus.org](http://www.hsus.org).

## During a Flood

- Listen to the radio or television for information.
- Remember that a **Flood Watch** means flooding is possible. Tune in to NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards, commercial radio, or television for information; **Flash Flood Watch** means flash flooding is possible. Be prepared to move to higher ground and listen to NOAA Weather Radio, commercial radio, or television for information; **Flood Warning** means flooding is occurring or will occur soon; if advised to evacuate, do so immediately. **Flash Flood Warning** means a flash flood is occurring; seek higher ground on foot immediately.

## During a Flood (Continued)

- Be aware that flash flooding can occur. If there is any possibility of a flash flood, move immediately to higher ground. Do not wait for instructions to move.
- Be aware of streams, drainage channels, canyons and other areas known to flood suddenly. Flash floods can occur in these areas with or without such typical warnings as rain clouds or heavy rain.
- Secure your home. If you have time, bring in outdoor furniture and move essential items to an upper floor.
- Turn off utilities at the main switches or valves if instructed to do so. Disconnect electrical appliances. Do not touch electrical equipment if you are wet or standing in water.
- Do not walk through moving water. Six inches of moving water can make you fall. If you have to walk in water, walk where the water is not moving. Use a stick to check the firmness of the ground in front of you.
- Do not drive into flooded areas. If floodwaters rise around your car, abandon the car and move to higher ground if you can do so safely. You and the vehicle can be quickly swept away.

## Driving Flood Facts

- Almost half of all flash flood fatalities occur in vehicles.
- Six inches of water will reach the bottom of most passenger cars causing loss of control and possible stalling.
- A foot of water will float many vehicles.
- Two feet of rushing water can carry away most vehicles including sport utility vehicles and pick-up trucks.
- If you come upon a barricaded or flooded road, **Turn Around and Don't Drown™**.

## After a Flood

- Listen for news reports to learn whether the community's water supply is safe to drink.
- Avoid floodwaters; water may be contaminated by oil, gasoline, or raw sewage. Water may also be electrically charged from underground or downed power lines.
- Avoid moving water.
- Be aware of areas where floodwaters have receded. Roads may have weakened and could collapse under the weight of a car.
- Stay away from downed power lines, and report them to the power company.
- Return home only when authorities indicate it is safe.
- Stay out of any building if it is surrounded by floodwaters.
- Use extreme caution when entering buildings; there may be hidden damage, particularly in foundations.
- Service damaged septic tanks, cesspools, pits, and leaching systems as soon as possible. Damaged sewage systems are serious health hazards.
- Clean and disinfect everything that got wet. Mud left from floodwater can contain sewage and chemicals.
- Discard canned, bottled, or sealed-in-plastic food items that have been dented or dislodged and knocked into things.

## The Recovery Process

- For direct assistance to individuals' and families' immediate needs, contact the American Red Cross or other local voluntary agencies.
- If you have flood insurance, contact your insurance agent as soon as possible.
- Obtain a free copy of FEMA 234 **Repairing your Flooded Home** or by visiting [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov).
- For information on helping children deal with disaster, visit [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov) or get a copy of FEMA 478 **Helping Children Cope with Disaster**. To obtain other fact sheets and publications call the FEMA Publications Warehouse at 1-800-480-2520. You can also visit [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).

Dangerous Flood Myth!	The Facts:
A 100-year flood occurs only once every 100 years.	The 100-year flood is a climatic average; there is a 1 percent chance that a 100-year flood will occur in any given year.