



Health advice: General information about mental health following floods

This factsheet provides important advice and information about the impacts of being flooded on people's mental health.

See the PHE website www.gov.uk/phe for further advice on the health effects of flooding.

Floods and mental health

Experiencing a flood can be frightening, and the activities of normal life can be disrupted. For most people, feeling temporarily distressed does not interfere with their abilities to cope with the process of recovery. However, it is important not to underestimate the stress and strain of being flooded and cleaning up after floods. Take the time to consider your and your family's mental health and well-being. Do not overdo it when cleaning up, and remember that tiredness, difficulty sleeping and anxiety are normal in these circumstances.

While the experience of a flood can be distressing, events that occur after a flood can also be a source of stress. They include:

- difficulties accessing continuing healthcare and prescription medications;
- difficulties with getting healthcare for new health problems
- disruption to normal household activities and separation from family and friends
- loss of school facilities and interrupted attendance at school
- feelings of loss of control and worry that flooding may reoccur
- seeking compensation, recovery and re-building of homes, submitting an insurance claim, loss of employment and /or income, and loss of physical possessions

While experiencing a flood is distressing, only a small minority of people are at risk of going on to develop further mental health problems. If a person's symptoms persist, they should visit their GP who can help to identify further sources of support.

What you can do

Support from families, friends and neighbours is key to helping to protect people from the negative impacts of flooding on mental health. Getting in touch and staying together with families and friends can help to reduce the suffering and promote recovery of

people who are affected. Community groups and interactions with local sources of support, including local authorities and agencies tasked with helping in recovery efforts, also help to provide support.

If you are helping someone who has been affected by flooding, there are simple techniques that you can use to offer support. These include:

- first, assess the situation and ensure that a person's circumstances are safe, and help them to make contact with recovery agencies if needed
- check that there are no immediate physical health needs, for example those that may require an ambulance or a hospital visit
- ask about needs and concerns, and identify if any basic needs are not met, such as access to food, water, shelter and medication
- help people to contact their loved ones and others who can provide familiar sources of support
- help to identify practical ways to address people's needs and access to services
- listen, provide information if you have it, and help people to make plans for next steps

It is often useful, before you offer to help, to become familiar with the nature of the flooding event, identify how those affected can access help and whether there are further flood risks in the near future.

More information about how to support people who have been affected by flooding or other emergencies can be found here: http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789241548205_eng.pdf.

Your local health services

Anyone with concerns for their health or mental health should contact their GP for advice, or NHS 111. If you want to check that your scheduled appointment is unaffected (eg GP, outpatient, inpatient at local hospital), use the usual local telephone numbers for your health services. In more severe circumstances the local NHS primary care trust may be issuing updates on access to local NHS services and NHS Choices is also a good source of local health service information

www.nhs.uk/service-search.

For further advice about the other health impacts of flooding see Public Health England website.

The latest alerts and general flooding advice are provided by the Environment Agency and Floodline (0345 988 1188 or 0845 988 1188).

A factsheet of general advice for the public can be found at www.hpa.org.uk/webc/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1317140405287.

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