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Frequently Asked Questions: Natural Disaster

What is my risk for tetanus?

State health officials recommend people in areas impacted by a natural disaster make sure they are up-to-date on their tetanus immunizations. Any type of wound, major or minor, could be an entry source for the tetanus organism. Routine tetanus boosters are recommended every 10 years. For people who receive more serious wounds, a tetanus booster is appropriate if you have not received one within the last 5 years. Tetanus vaccines are available from your primary care provider or your local health department. Visit the Indiana Department of Health's website for a complete listing of [local health departments](#) and information on [tetanus](#).

How can I find out if I need a tetanus vaccine?

For people with a dirty or deep wound, a tetanus booster is appropriate if you have not received one within the last five years. Immunization records for adults can be difficult to locate. Parents, former schools, childhood doctors or some health departments may have immunization records. Some adult immunization records may have been recently entered into the Indiana Immunization Registry, known as CHIRP. CHIRP was introduced in 2001 and does not contain all adult vaccination records. You may check with your health care provider to learn if some or all your immunization records are available in CHIRP. ***If you do not know if you are up-to-date on your immunizations for tetanus and you have a wound, it is recommended you get a tetanus booster. Talk to the nurse who administers to vaccine to see if you need additional treatment.***

I have a wound. Do I need to see a doctor?

If your wound is fewer than 12 hours old, you may need stitches if:

- The wound is jagged
- The wound is on your face
- The edges of the cut gape open

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For treatment of wounds, regardless of age, see a doctor for the following:

- Any deep cut or puncture wound on the hand or foot
- Any wound that continues to bleed
- An imbedded foreign body, sensation of a foreign body, or visible dirt in the wound
- The wound becomes tender or inflamed
- The wound produces pus or foul-smelling drainage
- You develop a temperature over 100 degrees F
- Red streaks form near the wound
- All bite wounds
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If you have a dirty or deep wound and you have NOT completed a primary series of three tetanus shots (usually given during childhood), you should receive a tetanus shot and see your primary care doctor.

What do I do if my birth/death certificate is lost or destroyed?

Individuals in counties declared as disaster emergency areas by the Governor who have birth/death certificates that were lost or destroyed as the result of a natural disaster can apply for new birth/death certificates at their [local health department](#) or from the Indiana Department of Health by visiting [Vital Records](#).

My power went out. What food is safe to eat/save?

Potentially hazardous foods are those foods that support the rapid and progressive growth of disease-causing bacteria, such as high protein foods (meat, eggs, dairy) and cooked vegetables. Foodborne illnesses can be caused by bacteria when these foods are stored in the temperature danger zone (41° to 135°F). Discard any food that has an unusual color, odor, or texture. In addition, any foods that may have been damaged from storms, floods, fire, etc., should not be consumed and should be disposed of. To learn more about food safety, visit the Indiana Department of Health's [website](#). ***When in doubt, throw it out!***

My county is under a boil order. How do I know if my water is safe?

Use only water that has been properly disinfected for drinking, cooking, making any prepared drink, or for brushing teeth. Use bottled water if available. To clean water, you may boil it or disinfect it using bleach. Store disinfected water in clean containers with covers.



- **Boiling Water:** Boiling water should make it safe and kill most types of disease-causing organisms. To make sure your water is safe, boil it for at least five minutes and let it cool.
- **Using Bleach:** If you can't boil water, you may disinfect it using household bleach. Bleach will kill some, but not all types of disease-causing bacteria. If the water is cloudy, filter it through a clean cloth or allow it to settle and draw off the clear water for disinfection. Add 6 to 8 drops **or** 1/8 teaspoon of regular, unscented liquid household bleach for each gallon of water, stir it well, and let it stand for 30 minutes before using it. If this treatment does not give the water a taste of chlorine, repeat the addition of chlorine until a slight taste of chlorine is present. The taste of chlorine will be evidence that the water is safe to drink.

Should I be worried about mold?

After natural disasters, such as tornadoes and floods, excess moisture and standing water can contribute to the growth of mold in homes and other buildings. People with asthma, allergies or other breathing conditions may be more sensitive to mold. You may recognize mold by sight (discolored walls or ceilings or water damage) and smell (musty, earthy smell). Mold can cause allergies to flare up, difficulty breathing, and possible mold infections in the lungs. To clean mold, use a solution of no more than 1 cup bleach to 1 gallon of water. Wear rubber gloves, protective clothing and a tight-fitting face mask when working around mold. When using bleach, ensure that enough fresh air is available because bleach may cause eye, nose, or throat irritation. ***Never mix chlorine liquids, such as bleach, with ammonia.***