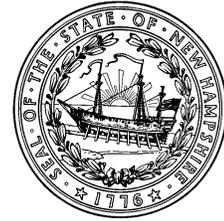


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DHHS Reminds Residents of Health Precautions to Take During and After a Hurricane

Concord, NH – Hurricane Irene is heading up the Eastern seaboard and there is a good possibility it will impact New Hampshire with strong winds, heavy rain, and power outages. The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Division of Public Health Services is urging residents to prepare and to take precautions against certain public health risks such as carbon monoxide poisoning, contaminated water, and spoiled food.

“While it is a little difficult at this point to know exactly how bad the storm will be,” said Dr. José Montero, Director of Public Health at DHHS, “people should prepare now just in case. Part of preparing should include knowing how to avoid potential hazards related to downed power lines, lack of electricity, and contaminated water.”

Carbon monoxide is an odorless and colorless gas emitted when fuels are burned, such as wood, propane, and natural gas. The more common symptoms can include dizziness, headache, blurred vision, weakness, vomiting, chest pain, nausea, and confusion. Extended exposure can result in death. If there is a power outage, do not bring outdoor cooking or heating units indoors, such as grills or portable fireplaces.

For an extended power outage, food safety is an issue. DHHS recommends taking the following steps during and after a weather emergency:

- Never taste food to determine if it is safe
- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature
- The refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) and the door remains closed
- Food can be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is at 40°F or below
- Get block ice or dry ice to keep your refrigerator and freezer as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for an extended period of time
- Discard refrigerated perishable food such as meat, poultry, fish, soft cheeses, milk, eggs, leftovers, and deli items after 4 hours without power.

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Storm water can carry sewage, chemicals, germs, and fuel. DHHS reminds people to take care and keep the following in mind in dealing with flooding:

- Avoid floodwater and flooded areas. Wear protection if you must travel through water that is part of a flood.
- If you use well water and your well has been flooded, make sure the well is tested and disinfected before using water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula
- Disinfect any items that come in contact with floodwater. Use ¼ cup of bleach per gallon of water as a disinfectant
- Remember that moisture accelerates mold growth, which can cause disease and allergic reactions. Remove standing water and wet items from indoors as soon as possible

DHHS will provide additional updates as new information becomes available. For more information on preparing for a hurricane, visit www.nh.gov/readynh. For more information about carbon monoxide safety, visit the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services' website at http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/air/pehb/ehs/iaqp/carbon_monoxide.htm or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at <http://www.cdc.gov/co/default.htm>. Questions about testing or disinfecting water should be directed to your local health department or to the Division of Public Health Services at 603-271-4496. For further information about food safety, visit www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater/facts.asp or call the DHHS Food Protection Section at 603-271-4589.

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