



Health Concerns After Katrina

Long-Term Conditions

If you have high blood pressure or diabetes and have not been able to take your medicines or insulin regularly, get medical care. Insulin may not work right if it has not been kept cold.

Diseases

The germ that causes cholera is rare in local waters, but there are related bacteria that can cause stomach cramps and diarrhea. These germs are not dangerous for most people, but can cause serious illness (including blood poisoning and skin infection) in people with liver diseases like hepatitis C or cirrhosis, or weak immune systems (like from HIV). Get medical help for any painful or fast-spreading sores.

E. coli, which has been found in New Orleans flood waters, is a germ that naturally lives in our intestines. Exposure to large amounts can cause cramps and diarrhea.

If you get stomach cramps, vomiting, or diarrhea, try to drink plenty of clean water. Avoid diarrhea medicine, since it is important to flush the germs out of your body. If vomiting or diarrhea last more than a couple of days, get medical care.

Hepatitis A

You can get hepatitis A from dirty water. A vaccine can prevent you from getting sick. Hepatitis A usually goes away by itself. But it can cause serious liver problems for people who already have liver diseases like hepatitis C or cirrhosis. It is especially important for these people to get the vaccine.

Tetanus

You can get tetanus (or “lockjaw”) from a dirty injury, such as a puncture from stepping on a rusty nail or getting dirty water in a deep cut. There is a vaccine to prevent tetanus. Many people get this vaccine as children, but you should get a booster shot every 10 years – or sooner if you get a dirty injury.

Mosquitoes

Local mosquitoes can carry West Nile Virus, but are not likely to transmit other diseases. Lemon eucalyptus oil and citronella are two insect repellents that are not toxic when used on the skin.

Dead Bodies

Dead bodies are not a major risk for disease. They usually do not spread infection through the air or water. Wear gloves when handling bodies, since a person’s body fluids could contain germs like hepatitis C virus or HIV. Mosquitoes do not feed on dead people and do not spread disease this way. Also wear gloves if you must touch a dead animal.

Animal and Snake Bites

If you are bitten by a dog or cat, wash the bite under running water. Get medical care if bitten on the face or hands. Rabies is rare in pet dogs and cats, but wild animals like raccoons and bats may carry it. If a person gets bitten by a snake, try to keep them calm, keep the bite lower than their heart, and get medical help. Remember what the snake looks like - this can help determine the right treatment. Don’t apply a tourniquet, cut the skin near the bite, or try to suck out the venom.