

Floods and private water sources

Community information

This information is for flood affected residents who do not have access to mains (reticulated water) and rely on private water sources such as rainwater or groundwater for drinking and use in and around the home.

If your area has been affected by flooding your private water source may be contaminated with floodwater. Flood water is likely to contain harmful microorganisms, debris and chemicals from overflowing sewage systems, septic tanks, agricultural or industrial wastes.

Is my private water safe?

If the water in your tank has not been affected by flood waters, the water should be safe to use.

If your water supply tastes, looks or smells unusual do not use it for drinking, bathing or for pets.

If your private water source has been affected by flood waters or your private water supply system is damaged, consider this water contaminated.

Water supplies sourced from roof-collected rainwater and stored in above ground tanks or deep bores properly cased with an above ground wellhead should continue to be safe for use, provided the structure has not been damaged.

Water should not be drawn from a river or creek that has been affected by flood water as the water may be contaminated.

If your water supply is from a shallow groundwater source (e.g. a well) that has been affected by flood impacted rivers or streams, consider this water source contaminated.

If your water is stored in an underground tank that may have, or has been subject to flood water inundation, consider this water source contaminated.

What should I do if I suspect my water supply is contaminated?

If your water supply tastes, looks or smells unusual do not use it for drinking, bathing or for pets.

You should arrange an alternative drinking water supply. Contact your local council for a list of water carting contractors in your area.

Will boiling or disinfecting water make it safe?

Boiling and disinfecting water kills harmful microorganisms, however this will not effectively remove chemical hazards.

Flood-affected rivers and streams may contain chemical contaminants from activities such as farming or toxic blue-green algae. Boiling or disinfecting the water will not make your water safe for drinking or domestic use.

When can I start using my water supply again?

Check your tank for structural soundness including cracks, debris, dead birds or other small animals. Dead birds or other small animals found in gutters or within the tank should be removed. Always use gloves and use a plastic bag for disposal. Disinfect your tank as described in the Department of Health and Human Services publication Your private drinking water supply.

If you have an underground tank that has been contaminated do not attempt to empty the tank while the surrounding ground is still saturated. Emptying water before the surrounding ground has dried out may result in damage to the tank and associated plumbing.

Do not enter a tank. Working in confined spaces is dangerous and should only be undertaken by a professional.

Once it is safe, engage a tank cleaning professional to empty your tank, hose out with clean water and sanitise it. Any associated plumbing, guttering, downpipes and roof structures inundated by flood waters or storm debris will also need to be cleaned and sanitised.

After your tank has been cleaned and sanitised, refill the tank with water from a source known to be safe. The water should also be appropriately disinfected using enough chlorine to give an initial chlorine dose of 5 mg/L. Refer to the Department of Health and Human Services' publication [Your private drinking water supply](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/water/private-drinking-water/about) <<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/water/private-drinking-water/about>>.

Contact a licensed plumber to reconnect and commission your system.

Shallow groundwater sources affected by flood water should be assessed by a water professional. The impacted groundwater storage well may require the contaminated water to be pumped out and disinfected prior to use.

If you know or suspect that electrical equipment associated with your water supply system has been affected by floods, have the equipment inspected and declared fit for use by a licensed electrician before use.

Further information

Local water carters or tank cleaners:

Contact the Environmental Health team of your local council or consult your local business directory.

Bores, roofing material, tank systems or ancillary equipment on your property:

Contact the installer or manufacturer for specific queries.

Plumbers:

Refer to your local business telephone directory for licensed service providers.

Health advice:

Contact your medical doctor regarding any health conditions that may have resulted from contaminated water supplies.

Private water supplies:

See the [Your private drinking water supply](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/water/private-drinking-water/about) booklet at <<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/water/private-drinking-water/about>>

Guidance on use of rainwater tanks:

See the Australian Government's [Guidance on use of rainwater tanks](https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-enhealth-raintank-cnt.htm) information at

<<https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-enhealth-raintank-cnt.htm>>

Groundwater and bore construction:

Contact the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning on 136 186 or www.delwp.vic.gov.au if you are considering constructing a bore you should also contact the water agency in your area.

Other public health information for floods:

Other public health information about floods is available at the [Department of Health and Human Services' 'Floods' webpage](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/floods) at

<<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/floods>>

Information on floods and private water sources, go to the [Better Health Channel!](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) <www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au>

To receive this document in another format, phone 1300 761 874, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email [email the Water Unit](mailto:water@dhhs.vic.gov.au) <water@dhhs.vic.gov.au>.

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

© State of Victoria, Australia, Department of Health, February 2021.