



# Water, Water Everywhere.....Water and Public health

Faculty of Public Health  
Medicine  
RCPI  
CME day  
Wednesday March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010

# Flooding: A Public Health Perspective

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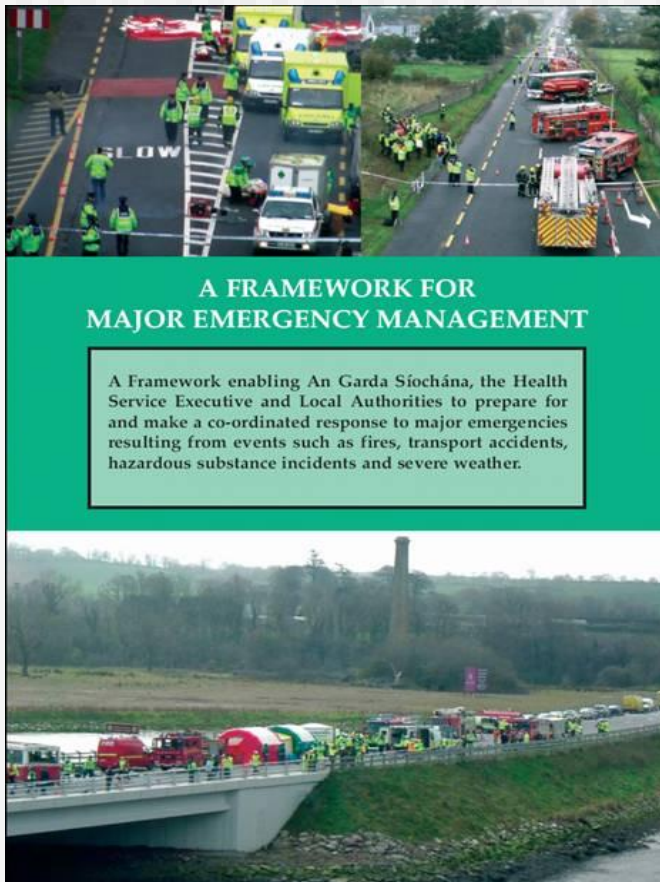
March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010

# Flooding

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- The Framework
- Role of Public Health
- Risk Assessment
- Risk Communication
- Resources

# The New Framework (2006)



- Cover sets out scope
- Inter-Agency Planning, Preparing and Responding to Events Such As
  - Fires, Transport Accidents, Hazardous Substance Incidents and Severe Weather
- By the Principal Response Agencies
  - An Garda Síochána
  - The Health Service Executive
  - The Local Authorities
- With Linked Issues
- Six sections

# The Role of Public Health

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- The Local Authority is the lead agency
- The flood alert mechanism should ensure that Public Health is within the alerting cascade for multiagency partners
- MEM Framework guidance document on flooding: the Public Health role is to provide advice and guidance on public health issues related to the flood event
- Public Health advice and guidance is based on the outcome of the Public Health risk assessment

# Public Health Risk Assessment

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- Identify the population concerned
- Assess the risk to public health
- Risk communication to the public
- Risk communication to key health and other professionals

# Public Health Risks Associated with Flooding

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- Drowning and injury
- Psychological distress
- Carbon Monoxide poisoning
- Infectious diseases
- Chemical exposure

*HPA Flooding Chemical Event Checklist*

# Surveillance to be undertaken in regions affected by flooding

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- monitor infectious diseases and health effects from exposure to environmental hazards
  - identify any emerging outbreaks of infectious disease
  - identify any major events of chemical contamination
  - contribute to the provision of timely information to the public through press briefings
1. *HPA Checklist for Response to Severe Flooding.*
  2. *HPA Interim Guidance for HPUs – Surveillance Activity During Floods.*

# Relevant Public Health resources

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- - CIDR
- - GP Co-op OOH database (HSE-NE)
- - Health Atlas
  - Liaison arrangements with NPIC (National Poisons Information Centre)

# Communicate risk to health and other professionals

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- HSE Crisis Management Team
- Interagency Local Co-ordination Group

# Risk Communication to the Public

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- Disruption of mains water supply with loss of drinking water
- Private water supplies
- Disruption of power supply
- Risk of carbon monoxide poisoning from use of generators, dehumidifiers etc
- Cleaning up safely after floods
- Prevent/reduce exposure to flood water, residues and other hazards (children).

# Risk Communication to the Public

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- Exposures to hydrocarbons, household and garden chemicals
- Food and allotments contaminated by flood water
- No additional immunisations are required; a tetanus booster is recommended if it is not up to date.

## *HPA Information Leaflets for the Public:*

- 1. General information following floods*
- 2. Coping without mains water*
- 3. How to clean up safely following floods*

# Cleaning up safely after floods

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- Hand-washing, protective clothing (wellies, apron, waterproof gloves)
- Wear a facemask and goggles for scrubbing, hosing or pressure washing.
- Cover cuts and sores with waterproof plasters
- Take care with electrics, gas and sharp objects

### 3. DRY OUT

- Open all doors and windows to ventilate your home.
- Ensure all air bricks and vents are unblocked.
- Allow all cleaned surfaces to dry completely as germs and mould thrive in wet conditions.
- Once your heating has been certified safe to use, it can be turned on to help dry out the house. (Keep the temperature around 20 to 22°C.)

**Remember if you feel unwell in the next few days, especially with a stomach upset, see your doctor immediately and tell them that you have been cleaning up floodwater.**

For further information contact your local Environmental Health Officer. Log on to [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie) for details.



**HSE**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL**  
**HEALTH**

**FLOODED**  
**HOMES**

Issued by the HSE Environmental Health Service  
Date of Issue: January 2009

# Risk Communication to the Public

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- Provide information regarding the psychological aspects of coping with flooding.

*Coping with Flooding, HSE Psychology Dept., Nov 2009.*

## HELPING CHILDREN COPE

Similar to adults, children can also be upset following a flood. They may be frightened by the flood itself, or be upset by disruptions that it might cause in their daily routines.

It is not unusual for children to show changes in behaviours, such as: becoming more easily upset; getting angry; being afraid to sleep alone; difficulty separating from parents; behaving as they did when they were younger (e.g. thumb sucking, bedwetting); physical symptoms and concentration difficulties. They may also want to continue talking about the flood and show "flood" themes in their play. Younger children may also feel guilty that they "caused" the flood because of some previous behaviour.

- If you have young children it can be wise to make your coping plan as parents first before sharing with the children.
- Talk to your children about the flooding and plans for the future. Let them share any worries or fears with you. Reassure them about their safety and that of their family.
- Children may need more physical contact and cuddles at this time. Don't worry if they want to sleep in your room at night – they may need this extra security for a little while.
- Do keep to normal routines and activities where possible, e.g. going to school, meal and bedtime routines.
- Young children may not have words to describe their feelings, but they can work through them in imaginative play, drawing and painting.
- Give children something productive to do appropriate for their age e.g. help with cleaning up. Praise their efforts.
- If you've had to leave your home, make sure you allow your children, especially teenagers, to keep in touch with and have the support of their friends.



## SUPPORT SERVICES IN GALWAY 2009

For information on practical/Community Welfare (financial) services, contact HSE Flooding Helpline 1800 283 036 (open Daytime Hours).

If you are feeling emotionally overwhelmed at the moment, you can contact the H.S.E. Counselling Helpline (Galway County Flooding) Freephone 1800 245 600 (9.30am to 5.00pm weekdays).

If after several weeks you or a family member continue to feel stressed and overwhelmed, and your mood or feelings disrupt your everyday life, consider making contact with the following services:

- **GP / Public Health Nurse** – to discuss possible referral to a local community support or mental health service.
- **The Samaritans** 1850 609 090 (24 hours)

If you have ongoing concerns about how your children have been emotionally affected by the floods, you can contact the H.S.E Child Psychology service through your local health centre.

Contact the HSE in foline on 1850 24 1850 for contact details for all HSE services nationwide, or visit [www.HSE.ie](http://www.HSE.ie)

Compiled by the Psychology Dept., HSE Galway, November 2009



# COPING WITH FLOODING



Experiencing flooding in your home or business can be very distressing. It can come as a great shock and give rise to a range of emotions.

This leaflet outlines a few suggestions which may be helpful to you and your family during this difficult time.