

After a flood: animal and insect-related hazards

Community information

When returning to a flood-affected area remember that wild animals, including rodents, snakes or spiders, may be trapped in your home, shed or garden.

General tips

- Do not approach wild or stray animals. For advice about dealing with animals contact your local council, animal shelter or vet.
- Store away all food to avoid attracting rodents such as rats and mice (for example, store food in containers with secure lids).
- Watch out for snakes.
- Mosquitoes can breed rapidly in stagnant waters and become a nuisance. Take precautions to control mosquitos around your home.
- Remove pets and other animals that have died as soon as possible. For advice on safe disposal speak to your local council or vet.

Dealing with snakes

Like other residents, snakes can lose their home during a flood. As a result, they may look for shelter and food inside houses, storage sheds and other buildings. Damaged structures and debris are more accessible to snakes.

When outdoors:

- Wear sturdy work boots and gloves, and long pants to protect your legs.
- Watch where you place your hands and feet when removing or cleaning up debris.
- If you see a snake, step back from it slowly and allow it to proceed on its way. Do not touch it.
- Remove debris from around your home as soon as practically possible because it can attract rodents, lizards and insects on which snakes feed.
- Be aware of snakes that may be swimming in the water trying to get to higher ground.

When indoors:

- If you find a snake in your house, do not panic.
- Seek advice from someone who knows how to safely remove the snake. Contact the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning on 136 186 for names of the nearest licensed snake catcher.

If you are bitten by a snake:

- Do not wash the skin around the bite.
- Keep still and calm, and get medical help quickly by calling triple zero (000).
- If you cannot get to a hospital right away, apply first aid – lay or sit down with the bite below the level of your heart. Cover the bite with a clean, dry dressing or bandage and, if possible, splint the limb.
- If possible write down the time of the bite and when the bandage was applied.
- Do not apply a tourniquet, cut the bite to release the venom or try to suck the venom out of the wound.

Spiders

If you are bitten by a red-back spider:

- Wash the affected area well and soothe the pain with ice packs or clean iced water.
- Applying pressure is not recommended for red-back spider bites and often worsens the pain.
- Find immediate medical help.

For other spider bites:

- Wash the area with soap and water.
- Apply a cold pack if the bite is painful.
- For most spider bites, no other first aid is necessary.
- Contact your doctor if symptoms develop or persist.

Discourage rodents

- Rodents (such as mice and rats) carry diseases and are a nuisance.
- Remove food and items that can provide shelter for rodents.
- Wash dishes and cooking utensils immediately after use.
- Get rid of garbage and debris as soon as possible by placing it into a rubbish bin with a lid prior to collection and disposal.
- Lay rodent baits or traps in dry areas, in accordance with the label directions and out of reach of children and animals.

Avoid mosquitoes

- In Victoria, some mosquitoes can carry diseases such as Ross River virus or Barmah Forest virus, which can be passed on to people through mosquito bites.
- Rain and flooding may lead to an increase in mosquito numbers as water subsides and pools form.

Things to do to avoid mosquito bites:

- Wear long pants, socks and long-sleeved shirts, and apply an insect repellent containing N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide (DEET) or picaridin to your skin.
- Follow the directions on the repellent's product label.
- Take care when using repellents on small children. Avoid parts of children's hands that may touch their eyes or mouth.

To help control mosquito populations around your home:

- If practical, drain any water left standing outdoors in open containers such as flowerpots, unused tins, tyres or buckets.
- Change your pet's drinking water regularly.

Flies

- Flies carry diseases and are a nuisance.
- If food and garbage builds up, this becomes a breeding ground for flies.
- Clean up food waste as soon as possible by placing it into a rubbish bin with a lid prior to collection and disposal.

For further information

If you have been bitten by a snake get immediate medical attention by calling triple zero (000).

If you have been bitten or injured by an animal or insect seek advice from your doctor.

For information about licensed snake catchers contact the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning Customer Information Centre on 136 186.

For more information on bites and stings, spiders and mosquitoes go to the Better Health Channel at:

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au