



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 20, 2018

18-033

## Hawaii Department of Health reminds public to “stay out of brown water” and “if in doubt throw it out”

HONOLULU – As the state remains under a flash flood watch and wet weather conditions are forecast to continue across the islands through the end of this week, the Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) urges residents and visitors to take precautions to ensure their safety in the days ahead.

### **Avoid brown water and pay attention to advisories**

Coastal waters off of Kauai and the Windward side of Oahu are under brown water advisories due to pollution caused by heavy rains. After confirmatory testing on Kauai, there are no advisories issued for beaches from Keoniloa Bay to Sheraton Beach at this time. The public is advised to stay out of floodwaters and storm water runoff due to possible overflowing cesspools, sewer, manholes, pesticides, animal fecal matter, dead animals, pathogens, chemicals, and associated flood debris. Children should not be allowed to play in floodwater areas.

If you must enter brown water along coastlines or in areas where water has pooled due to flooding, take precautions to cover any open wounds or injuries, and be sure to wash and rinse thoroughly with soap and clean water afterwards. For the latest updates on brown water advisories, visit DOH’s Clean Water Branch website at <https://eha-cloud.doh.hawaii.gov/cwb/#!/landing> and sign up for mobile alerts.

### **Practice food safety and proper handling**

Severe weather conditions may cause power outages and disrupt refrigeration of food. Refrigerated food is safe as long as power is out no more than four hours. Discard perishable food that has been above 40°F for more than two hours. Throw away spoiled or unrefrigerated food to prevent foodborne illnesses. Use covered and sealed containers for disposal to minimize the presence of flies and rodents. Wash all produce carefully, no matter where it’s from, under clean, running water, and cook food thoroughly. For information on food safety go to [https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/refridg\\_food.html](https://www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/refridg_food.html).

Wash your hands often with soap and clean water to prevent spreading and contracting any illnesses, especially before handling and preparing food to avoid food contamination. If soap and clean water is unavailable, alcohol-based hand-sanitizers may be used instead. For more

information on health risks during flooding, visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's site: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/extreme-weather/floods-standingwater.html>.

### **Dealing with water-damaged items**

Exposure to mold and other biological contaminants can have harmful health effects. Mold can begin to grow within 24-48 hours after flooding. Remove standing water as quickly as possible. Take steps to dry out your home and remove wet materials and objects. Items that cannot be cleaned and dried within 24-48 hours should be discarded. Make sure to wear protective gear (i.e. gloves, face masks, etc.) during the entire cleanup process and follow all label instructions when using cleaners and disinfectants. Additional tips can be found from DOH's Indoor and Radiological Health Branch at <http://health.hawaii.gov/irhb/iagpdf/> and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-09/documents/floods.pdf>.

### **Prevent mosquito breeding areas**

Mosquitoes can and will breed in areas of standing water. Apply mosquito repellent containing DEET to exposed skin and wear protective clothing, such as long sleeves, long pants, and covered shoes. If you're located in an area that wasn't as heavily impacted, get rid of standing water where you can. Keep rain gutters clear so water may flow freely. Department of Health vector control staff will be available to conduct mosquito abatement activities, including surveillance and treatment. If water remains stagnant, there may be a "bloom" of mosquitoes in the next two to three weeks. For more tips, visit DOH's website at <https://health.hawaii.gov/docd/files/2016/12/FTB-Door-Hanger.pdf>.

### **Control rats, slugs and snails on your property**

Widespread flooding has increased pockets of moisture as well as debris across communities. Control rats, slugs and snails on your property by eliminating their food sources and cleaning up trash. Use traps and bait according to label instructions and always wear gloves. Collect slugs and snails and dispose of them in a hard plastic or glass container filled with seven parts water to one part chlorine, bleach, or salt. These steps can help prevent illnesses such as rat lungworm disease. For more information, go to the University of Hawaii's College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources' website at <http://manoa.hawaii.edu/ctahr/farmfoodsafety/rat-lungworm/>.

### **Take steps to support good mental health**

Natural disasters are stressful and can cause emotional reactions, which everyone experiences differently. Taking care of your emotional and mental health will go a long way while trying to recover from a natural disaster. Talk to your family members and friends to maintain a strong support system. Help your children by sharing age-appropriate information and being honest. Set a good example for children by taking care of yourself. Take breaks and unwind periodically and ask for help if you need it. In the aftermath of a natural disaster, eligibility for mental health services is very broad and services are available to anyone with needs related to the disaster. For more resources, visit <http://health.hawaii.gov/amhd/consumer/access/>.

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