

Looking after yourself and others

This fact sheet provides key health and safety tips for people involved in a community recovery operation. [Note: Prior to nominating themselves, all persons should take into consideration their own physical and psychological capacities to undertake this type of work]

Work health and safety obligations

Follow health and safety instructions and do not recklessly endanger themselves or co-workers' health and safety

- Use any personal protective/safety equipment that is issued to them
- Report any injury, illness or incident to the community recovery team leader and record this using the Department's work injury, illness and incident report form (WIRF)
- Where a hazard is identified, eliminate where possible (e.g. remove broken furniture, dispose of frayed/damaged power cords) or minimise the immediate risk (tape down lifted carpet tear) and report to team leader/manager to be actioned
- Seek appropriate first aid or medical treatment where necessary

Clothing and personal protective equipment

Prior to being deployed, a potential community recovery worker should pack appropriate:

- Hat (consider broad-brimmed hat / cap)
- Shirt/blouse (consider long sleeved, loose fitting comfortable shirt/blouse or similar)
- Jacket (consider a lightweight spray jacket, an all-weather jacket, warm jacket or similar)
- Trousers or slacks (consider long trousers, slacks or similar)
- Footwear (consider comfortable, non-slip, water resistant, enclosed shoes/boots)
- During community recovery operations, community recovery workers should:
- Wear appropriate clothing for the environment and weather conditions
- Use personal protective /safety equipment issued to you such as sunscreen, insect repellent, hand sanitiser, face masks.

Moving around and driving

Flood damage can occur to roads, bridges, fences etc. Floodwaters can also conceal other dangers, such as fallen power lines or damage to roads, bridges and footpaths. Surfaces will be slippery.

To protect against potential personal slips, trips and falls and vehicle accidents:

- Wear appropriate footwear (comfortable, non-slip, water resistant, enclosed footwear)
- Be aware of the environment and weather conditions during community recovery operations.

If a community recovery worker is required to drive an allocated vehicle and/or conduct a home or site visit during a community recovery operation, this should only take place following consultation between the community recovery worker and team leader.

Specific information is contained in the Community Recovery Fact Sheets: **Home & site visits** and **Safe driving**.

Flood-related infectious diseases

During floods raw sewage may contaminate local waterways and soil. Water supplies and food handling facilities may be compromised which can lead to an increased risk of Hepatitis A and gastroenteritis transmission. To protect against these risks:

- Use bottled or boiled water for drinking and personal hygiene (e.g.: brushing teeth) if the water supply is declared unsafe by environmental health officials
- Avoid food that has not been prepared in hygienic conditions
- Wash and dry hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water. Use alcohol-based cleansing gel when soap and clean water is not available
- Seek first aid assistance and advice immediately if you become unwell.

Insect bites

Swarms of mosquitoes, midges, sand flies and black flies typically breed in the days following floods. Mosquitoes in particular may carry Ross River, Dengue and Barmah Forest viruses, which cause illness characterised by fever, rash and joint pain. Insect bites may result in irritation and sores which in a flood disaster area can become infected. To protect against these risks:

- Wear and use appropriate clothing and personal protective equipment
- At all times use an insect repellent that contains DEET or picaridin
- Avoid going outside when mosquitoes are most active, from late afternoon until two to three hours after dusk, and in the early morning just prior to and just after sunrise
- Use insecticide spray regularly (e.g.: Mortein or similar) and consider screening sleeping quarters and using a mozzie zapper and mozzie coils overnight (where applicable)
- Seek first aid assistance and advice for insect bites or if you become unwell.

Fatigue and psychological reactions

Community recovery work can involve longer hours of work away from home in unfamiliar surroundings. This can result in fatigue related problems such as, impaired decision making and judgement, poor concentration, slowed reflexes and responses. This type of work may involve direct or vicarious experience of emotionally distressing and possibly life-threatening events. This may lead to worry, uncharacteristic irritability or moodiness, sleep disturbances or recurring thoughts and images about the event. To protect against these risks:

- Eat regular nutritious meals/snacks and keep well hydrated
- Sleep and rest as much as possible during nominated down time
- Maintain a moderate alcohol consumption in your down time after your rostered hours
- Maintain professionally appropriate emotional distance from disaster victims
- Contact the confidential Employee Assistance Service if necessary 24 hours a day 7 days a week via Benestar **1300 360 364**.