

Floods

Ready.gov · Source: FEMA

What to do before, during and after a flood, and why you never walk or drive through flood water.

READ WITH CARE

FEMA last updated this page on 27 August 2026; we copied it on 30 September 2026. FEMA revises this guidance, so check the original for the current version, and in a real emergency follow instructions from local officials.

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Floods

Flooding is a temporary overflow of water on land that is normally dry. Floods are the most common disaster in the United States. Failing to evacuate flooded areas or entering flood waters can lead to injury or death.

Floods may:

- Result from rain, snow, coastal storms, storm surges and overflows of dams and other water systems.
- Develop slowly or quickly. Flash floods can come without warning.
- Cause outages, disrupt transportation, damage buildings and create landslides.

If you are under a flood warning

- Find safe shelter right away.
- Do not walk, swim or drive through flood waters. **Turn Around, Don't Drown!**
- Remember, just six inches of moving water can knock you down, and one foot of moving water can sweep your vehicle away.
- Stay off bridges over fast-moving water.
- Depending on the type of flooding: Evacuate if told to do so. Move to higher ground or a higher floor. Stay where you are.

Before a Flood

- **Know your risk for floods**, visit FEMA's Flood Map Service Center to know types of flood risks in your area. However, remember that flooding doesn't follow lines on a map.
- Where it rains it can flood. Sign up for your community's warning system. The Emergency Alert System (EAS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- Weather Radio also provide emergency alerts. The National Risk Index
- **Purchase flood insurance or renew** a flood insurance policy. Homeowner's insurance policies do not cover flooding. It typically takes up to 30 days for a policy to go into effect, so the time to buy is well before a disaster. Get flood coverage under the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP).
- **Preparing for a Flood** - Make a plan for your household, including your pets so that you and your family know what to do, where to go and what you will need to protect yourselves from flooding. Learn and practice evacuation routes, shelter plans and flash flood response. Gather supplies, including non-perishable foods, cleaning supplies and water for several days, in case you must leave immediately or if services are cut off in your area.
- In case of emergency, keep documents in a waterproof container. Create password-protected digital copies. Protect your property. Move valuables to higher levels. Declutter drains and gutters. Install check valves. Consider a sump pump with a battery.

During a Flood

- Evacuate immediately, if told to do so. Never drive around barricades. Local responders use them to safely direct traffic out of flooded areas.
- Contact your healthcare provider if you are sick and need medical attention. Wait for further care instructions and shelter in place, if possible. If you are experiencing a medical emergency, call 9-1-1.
- Listen to EAS, NOAA Weather Radio or local alerting systems for current emergency information and instructions regarding flooding.
- Do not walk, swim or drive through flood waters. **Turn Around. Don't Drown!**
- Stay off bridges over fast-moving water. Fast-moving water can wash bridges away without warning.
- Stay inside your car if it is trapped in rapidly moving water. Get on the roof if water is rising inside the car.
- Get to the highest level if trapped in a building. Only get on the roof if necessary and once there, signal for help. Do not climb into a closed attic to avoid getting trapped by rising floodwater.

After a Flood

- Pay attention to authorities for information and instructions. Return home only when authorities say it is safe.
- Avoid driving except in emergencies.
- Wear heavy work gloves, protective clothing and boots during cleanup and use appropriate face coverings or masks if cleaning mold or other debris.
- People with asthma and other lung conditions and/or immune suppression should not enter buildings with indoor water leaks or mold growth that can be seen or smelled. Children should not take part in disaster cleanup work.
- Be aware that snakes and other animals may be in your house.
- Be aware of the risk of electrocution. Do not touch electrical equipment if it is wet or if you are standing in water. Turn off the electricity to prevent electric shock if it is safe to do so.
- Avoid wading in floodwater, which can be contaminated and contain dangerous debris. Underground or downed power lines can electrically charge the water.
- Use a generator or other gasoline-powered machinery **ONLY** outdoors and away from windows.

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End of the agency text.

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