**Public Health Concerns Following Earthquakes**

Major public health issues may arise after an earthquake. Water and food safety, carbon monoxide poisoning prevention and disease prevention may be concerns. Learning what actions to take can help you and your family stay safe and healthy.

**Drinking Water**

Water and sewage lines may be damaged during an earthquake. Check them carefully. If water pipes are damaged, contact the water company and avoid using water from the tap. If sewage lines are damaged, avoid touching raw sewage and call a plumber.

Safe drinking water includes bottled, boiled or treated water. If your water supply has not been harmed from earthquake damage and is safe for drinking, continue to use as normal.

Drinking water should be stored before an emergency happens. The recommended minimum drinking water supply is 1 gallon per person per day. Water should also be stored for food preparation, bathing, brushing teeth and dishwashing. Keep a 3 to 5 day supply of water (at least 5 gallons for each person) in sturdy plastic bottles with tight-fitting lids and away from direct sunlight. Stored water should be changed every 6 months.

If you do not have enough water stored, untreated water can be boiled to kill harmful bacteria and parasites. Bring water to a rolling boil for 1 minute to kill most organisms. If you can't boil water, you can treat water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets or unscented household chlorine bleach. If you use chlorine tablets or iodine tablets, follow the directions that come with the tablets. If using household bleach, add 1/8 teaspoon of bleach per gallon of water, if the water is clear. For cloudy water, add 1/4 teaspoon of bleach per gallon. Mix the solution well and let it stand for about 30 minutes before using. Treating water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets or liquid bleach will not kill many parasitic organisms. Boiling water is the best way to kill parasites..

Limit the amount of soda, caffeine drinks or alcohol you drink during this time. These drinks can dehydrate the body, which increases the need for drinking water.

**Food Safety**

Food that is not stored or handled correctly during long power outages can become contaminated and cause serious or life-threatening illness. Keep freezers closed to maintain the correct temperature for frozen foods. Milk, dairy products, meats, eggs and leftovers should be placed in a cooler surrounded by ice if the outage lasts for more than 4 hours. Dry ice can be used to keep refrigerators cold. *Never touch dry ice with bare hands or breathe its vapors in an enclosed area. Dry ice is frozen carbon dioxide, a gas.*

Refrigerated foods should be safe as long as power is out for no more than 4 hours. Throw out any perishable food in your refrigerator, such as meat, poultry, lunchmeat, fish, dairy products, eggs and any prepared or cooked foods that have been exposed to temperatures above 41 degrees Fahrenheit for 4 hours. Bacteria can multiply to unsafe levels under these conditions.

**Carbon Monoxide Poisoning**

Alternative power sources such as generators and kerosene heaters are often used during power outages. Incorrect use of these devices can cause carbon monoxide to build up in homes or garages, resulting in sudden illness and death. You cannot see or smell carbon monoxide (CO). Never use generators, pressure washers, grills, camp stoves, or other gasoline, propane, natural gas, or charcoal-burning devices inside your home, basement, garage, or camper—or even outside near an open window, door or vent.

Don't heat your house with a gas oven. If you are too hot or too cold, or you need to prepare food, don't put yourself and your family at risk for CO poisoning—look to friends, family or a local shelter for help.

Install and regularly maintain a CO detector. If the detector sounds, leave your home immediately and call 911.

Call 911 or the Kentucky Poison Control Hotline at 1-800-222-1222 if you suspect CO poisoning and have a headache or chest pain, are feeling dizzy, light-headed or nauseated.

**Hand Washing**

Keep hands clean during an emergency to stop the spread of germs. Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected. When water is not available, alcohol-based hand cleansers (sanitizers) can be used. Make sure you clean your hands:

* Before and after preparing and eating food.
* After using the toilet.
* After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet.
* Before and after treating someone who is sick.
* After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing.
* After handling animal waste or garbage.
* Before and after treating a cut or wound.

**Air Pollution**

Natural disasters such as earthquakes often release a large amount of concrete or dust into the air from damaged buildings. Wear a facemask if you have to be in these areas to help you avoid bad air. People with chronic respiratory or pulmonary conditions should especially avoid areas with rubble dust.

**Hypothermia**

Hypothermia occurs when the body is not warmed properly and cannot function properly. In severe cases it can be deadly. To prevent hypothermia, wear clothing that is appropriate for the temperature. Layer clothes and remember to wear a hat, coat, scarf or gloves if it is cold. Stay as dry as possible.

Symptoms of hypothermia are shivering, altered speech pattern, slow rate of breathing, cold pale skin and sluggishness. Seek medical attention immediately if you are experiencing the signs of hypothermia.

For more information, go to <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/earthquakes/>.

Courtesy of the Kentucky Department for Public Health