

# Recreational Water Safety After Hurricane Helene



Due to widespread flooding in western North Carolina, the public should use caution during recreational water activities such as fishing, swimming and boating. Lakes, rivers, streams and other recreational waters impacted by severe flooding could contain raw sewage and have higher than normal levels of fertilizer nutrients, household and/or industrial chemicals or E. coli. Human-made debris, both hidden and visible, may also be present.

NCDHHS recommends the following guidelines for recreational waters in western NC and downstream waterways:

- **Avoid Suspicious Water Conditions:** Be cautious if the water appears discolored, has a strong odor or contains visible debris. Such conditions may indicate poor water quality or possible bacterial contamination.
- **Rinse After Water Contact:** If contact does occur with water that appears discolored, has a strong odor or contains visible debris, rinse the contacted area with fresh water and use soap if available.
- **Cover Open Wounds:** Completely bandage open wounds with waterproof bandages, especially following recent surgeries or procedures.
  - Flood-impacted waters could contain bacteria that can cause wound infections or tetanus, which is a potentially serious health threat for exposed, unvaccinated individuals. Being up to date with a tetanus toxoid-containing vaccine, like Tdap and Td, is highly recommended.
- **Monitor for Symptoms:** Be alert for any symptoms you or your family members experience after water activities, such as skin irritations, gastrointestinal issues, respiratory problems or unusual behavior. If you or your family exhibit any concerning symptoms, seek medical attention promptly.
- **Stay Updated on Water Quality Advisories:** Stay informed about water quality advisories or warnings issued by local authorities for recreational waters. These advisories may include alerts about harmful algal blooms or bacterial contamination.

For more information about Hurricane Helene and resources available for people who are impacted, please visit [ncdhhs.gov/helene](https://www.ncdhhs.gov/helene) and [ncdps.gov/helene](https://www.ncdps.gov/helene).



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