

Disease Risks and Sewage Exposure

Raw sewage can contain certain biological agents such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites. However, the risk of illness depends on the type and the duration of exposure to the sewage. The most common mode of infection is through oral contact. Skin contact alone does not pose a health threat unless you have an open wound. The risk of exposure when handling sewage can be **reduced significantly** by effective and immediate clean-up and by taking appropriate safety precautions

Some biologic agents in sewage

Bacteria (examples: E. coli, salmonella) may cause diarrhea, fever, cramps, or vomiting.

Parasite (example: giardia) may cause diarrhea, and stomach cramps

Viruses

- Hepatitis A causes liver disease. You may feel abdominal pain, nausea, jaundice (yellow skin) or diarrhea. The CDC says sewage workers are **not** at more risk of hepatitis A infection than other workers.
- Hepatitis B causes liver disease. You may have jaundice (yellow skin), abdominal pain, or nausea. The disease has **not** been linked to exposure to sewage in the U.S.
- Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) causes AIDS. There are **no** known cases of wastewater workers getting HIV from their jobs in the U.S. and **the risk is virtually nonexistent**

Safety Precautions

- Assume anything touched by sewage is contaminated.
- Do not eat or drink or smoke in sewage handling areas.
- Wash hands well with soap and clean water before eating or touching mouth or face.
- Wash hands with soap and clean water after touching any surfaces or objects that may have been contaminated.
- Do not touch your nose, mouth, eyes or ears with your hands, unless you have just washed.
- Immediately wash and disinfect any wound that comes into contact with sewage.
- Shower and change out of your clothes before leaving. Launder clothes separately or discard.
- Vaccinations: If you've been exposed to sewage, you need to be up-to-date on your shots for tetanus and diphtheria (Adults should have had a shot within the last 10 years).
- Contact a doctor immediately if illness occurs



Hand washing steps:

1. Use soap and warm running water.
2. Scrub hands for at least 20 seconds; use a nail brush.
3. Wash all surfaces:
 - Between fingers
 - Under fingernails
 - Back of hands
 - Wrists
4. Rinse well and dry hands with a clean paper towel.



**Tri-County Health
Department**

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