

Check for alerts and sign up for warnings

Flooding can happen even if you don’t live or work near a river or the sea, so it's important to check the risk of flooding in your area.

Visit the Government's website to check for the risk of flood in your area. You can also check your long-term flood risk from rivers, the sea, surface water, reservoirs and groundwater.

If your home or business is at risk of flooding, you can sign up for free flood warnings from the Environment Agency. These warn of the risk of flooding from rivers, the sea and groundwater and you’ll be alerted by phone, email or text when flooding is expected.

Types of Environment Agency flood warnings

The Environment Agency issues three types of flood warning:



Flood alert - Prepare

A **flood alert** is issued when forecasts show that flooding may be possible from rivers, high tides or strong winds at sea.

It means that flooding is possible within two to 12 hours, so **you should prepare now.**



Flood warning - Act

A **flood warning** means that flooding is expected from rivers, heavy rain or high tides coupled with strong winds at sea.

It means that flooding is possible within 30 minutes to two hours, so **you should act now.**



Severe flood warning - Survive

A **severe flood warning** means that flooding could cause danger to life and significant disruption to communities. **You must act now.**

Stay in a safe place, call 999 if you're in immediate danger and follow advice from emergency services.

Before a flood

The best way to protect yourself from flooding is to know what to do in advance. If you live in a flood risk area, do what you can now to prepare for a flood. Don’t wait until it happens; you may not have time.

Personal flood plans

Creating a personal flood plan will ensure that you have thought about what you need to do in the event of a flood and have all the relevant and useful information in one easily accessible place.

It usually includes things like:

- checking if your insurance covers you for flooding
- thinking how you could stop water entering your property
- making sure you know how to safely turn off your gas, electricity and water
- considering which important documents and possessions need to be stored so they won't be damaged by flood water and can easily be accessed in an emergency
- compiling a list of useful contacts such as your utility companies, banks, insurances and doctors

You can download a personal flood plan template from the Environment Agency website to help you compile a list of things you should do to prepare for a flood. To find out more about support for community flood resilience, visit the Devon Community Resilience Forum webpage.



Adapting your property to the risk of flooding

If your property is flooded it can be very disruptive and upsetting. It can also be expensive and take a long time to repair. It may not be possible to fully protect your property against flooding, but there is a lot you can do to reduce the amount of flood water that gets in.

For example, you could install a flood resistant front door or buy temporary, removable flood barriers for your doors and covers for air bricks. You could also fit flood resistant valves to drains and water pipes that close under pressure and stop sewage and dirty water flooding into your property.

You can make changes to your property to reduce the damage caused by flooding, such as attaching dry-lining to walls, using water resistant materials such as tiles, plastic and solid wood and raising electrical items such as TVs, fuse boxes and control systems to at least 1.5 metres off the floor.

If your property is flooded, using a pump system can reduce the length of time water remains, which reduces damage and helps to speed up the cleaning and drying process.

Visit the Government's website to find out more, including flood protection products and services at Blue Pages and flood specialists at the Property Care Association.

Pack a flood kit

A flood kit should contain items that are essential to you. Packing one in advance will save time in the event of a flood, however some items such as medication and mobile phones may have to be gathered later when a flood warning is issued.

A flood kit should be packed into a sturdy bag, such as a rucksack and stored in an easy to find place. You may want to include:

- a copy of your flood plan
- important documents (passports, insurances etc) and contact information
- torches
- warm, waterproof, and dry clothing and footwear
- medicines
- baby care items
- bottled drinking water
- first aid kit
- spare keys
- mobile phone or device charger or spare batteries

Some items are more essential than others, but depending on how much you can fit in your flood kit you may be able to take extra useful items such as; wellies, camera, notepad and pen, battery operated radio, pet food and other supplies and toys to keep children occupied.

Utility Priority Services Register

Flooding can disrupt power and water supplies. This can be particularly worrying if you have specific medical or communication needs.

Priority Service Registers are used by utility companies to help people who may need extra support due to age, ill health, mental health problems, language barriers or financial worries.

The services are free of charge and provide extra assistance when there is a disruption to utility supplies.

Contact South West Water, National Grid and your specific gas or electricity supplier for more information. You'll need to sign up for each individual service as the companies do not share data between them.



During a flood

The most important thing to do during a flood is to make sure that you and your family remain safe!

Flood water is often dangerous because it can be deep, fast flowing and contain hidden debris or be contaminated, so stay out of it. If your property begins to flood, either move to upper parts of the building and call for assistance, or leave by a safe, dry route.

If it's safe to do so, turn off your electricity supply via your isolator switch or fuse unit. Do not touch any electrical appliances, cables or equipment while stood in flood water or any which have been immersed in flood water.

Don’t attempt to walk through flooded areas as even shallow moving water can sweep you off your feet. Flood water can also hide dangers like open drains, damaged road surfaces, submerged debris or deep channels that can cause serious injuries or even death.

Never drive through floodwater or swollen flowing water, you don’t know how deep it is. Vehicles can become stuck and even swept away in just 30cm of flowing water. If your vehicle stalls, leave it immediately and find safety on higher ground.

After a flood

If utility supplies to your property have been cut-off due to the flood water, then do not return to your property until these have been checked and the supplier has either reinstated the service or confirmed it is safe to return.

Wait for the flooding to subside before re-entering your property, and try to return in the day time. Be aware of potential hazards, such as hidden debris and contamination, and take necessary precautions to ensure your safety.

If you need to contact your insurance company, do this as soon as possible. Most insurance companies have a 24 hour helpline. If you haven't got insurance, the National Flood Forum can offer help and support.

Before you start cleaning, take photographs to document damage and record the flood water height, and ask your insurer before discarding items that cannot be cleaned.

Flood water may contain harmful substances like sewage, chemicals and animal waste which could make you unwell, so when cleaning your property always wear gloves, a face mask and sturdy footwear and wash your hands and clothing thoroughly afterwards. Find out how to clean up your home safely after a flood.

If you use heaters or dehumidifiers to dry out your property, make sure there's good ventilation. Never use petrol or diesel-powered generators indoors – their exhaust gases are potentially lethal.

Take advice from specialists before starting repairs to your property. Most of the repair work after flooding will need to be undertaken by professionals appointed by your insurers.

Health guidance and advice

It's important not to underestimate the stress and strain of being flooded, and it can cause a range of health problems.

There may be direct effects such as physical injury, or an increased risk of developing skin or gut infections through contact with contaminated flood water.

Longer-term effects can include chest problems due to exposure to mould and damp, and the impact flooding can have on people's mental health and wellbeing.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) website has lots of useful guidance on how to safely clean your property after a flood and advice to help you mentally cope and recover.

Make sure you report a flood

Types of flooding

Simply put, flooding is an overflow of water, but there are many different types of flood depending on where that water comes from and why it is overflowing.



River flooding (fluvial flooding)

Occurs when the capacity of a river is exceeded, causing it to burst its banks. It's usually as a result of heavy rain, but can also be caused by obstructions in the river, such as a build-up of rubbish or a fallen tree, or runoff caused by melting snow.

Main river flooding should be reported to the Environment Agency on 0800 80 70 60.



Groundwater flooding

Occurs when the water table rises up to the surface during a prolonged wet period as the ground becomes so waterlogged that it can no longer drain water away naturally. Low lying areas, areas near aquifers and properties with cellars or basements are more likely to experience groundwater flooding.

Groundwater flooding should be reported to our Customer Service Centre on 0345 155 1004.



Surface water flooding

Occurs when the volume of rainfall is unable to drain away through the drainage systems or soak into the land quickly enough and instead flows over land. Blocked drains and sewers can increase the risk of surface water flooding as the water has nowhere to go.

Surface water flooding should be reported to our Customer Service Centre on 0345 155 1004.



Coastal flooding

When the coast is flooded by the sea. The most common cause is storm surges in conjunction with high tides, where the storm wind creates higher than
normal waves.

Coastal flooding should be reported to the Environment Agency on 0800 80 70 60.



Sewer flooding

The result of overloaded sewers following heavy rainfall, or due to damage or blockages caused by misuse of the sewer system such as flushing unsuitable items down the toilet. Can be extremely hazardous to health as the water is full of bacteria and contaminants.

Sewer flooding should be reported to South West Water on 0344 346 2020.