

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

No. 101.11

DOMESTIC SWIMMING POOLS INUNDATED WITH FLOODWATER

When a swimming pool has been inundated with floodwater there are many issues that need to be considered. It is not essential that a swimming pool be restored to use immediately but it is essential to assess the condition of the swimming pool and make it safe before starting any work. An unused swimming pool is not likely to transmit, or become a source of, diseases in the short term unless sewage has contaminated the pool.

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- 1. Initial Assessment:** Once the floodwaters have receded the swimming pool needs to be assessed to determine that the fencing is intact to prevent children from accidental drowning. Check any pump house and other structures to ensure that snakes, spiders or other pests are not a threat. Be cautious around reptiles and insects that appear to be dead as they may, in fact, be still alive. Secure or restrict access to the area if possible, particularly if fences have been damaged or debris has made the area dangerous. The Department of Local Government Housing and Sports - Water Safety Branch can answer questions on swimming pool fencing. They can be contacted on 8999 8520.
- 2. Electrical Safety:** If the swimming pool and the pump, timer and any electrical equipment have been fully inundated ensure that once the floodwater has receded that a licensed electrician checks the circuits and each electrical fitting to ensure its electrical integrity. This may need to be done in consultation with the local pool shop in case electrical components need to be replaced.
- 3. Construction Integrity:** Severe damage may mean that the pool area should be secured, made safe and/or abandoned until a consultant (or insurance assessor) is able to give professional advice. Do not pump out a swimming pool immediately as this may cause more structural damage than leaving the pool full. An empty pool, particularly a fibreglass pool, may pop out of the ground. Check the pool surrounds for wash outs, missing paving materials or deposited debris. Eventually the pool may need to be pumped/cleaned out to allow a full assessment of the damage.
- 4. Nuisance Conditions:** While the pool is full but not able to be restored it may provide harbourage to mosquito breeding and it should be checked daily. If mosquito breeding is detected then 1 cup of household kerosene should be added to the pool water weekly. If the pool starts to turn green then an algal bloom is forming. The local swimming pool shop should be consulted to determine the best practice to minimise the algal bloom.
- 5. Water Quality – Soil, silt or debris present:** The contents of the pool need to be assessed. If the pool has received silt or other soil material during the flood it may need to be pumped or bucketed out. There may be unusual material washed into the pool that could be hazardous as well as affecting the pool water quality. Power and Water needs to be consulted as to where the pool contents may be discharged. It is not appropriate to pump out the pool to the sewer.

- 6. Water Quality – No soil or large debris present:** The water is likely to be very dirty and any attempt to filter the water will rapidly clog the filter. Consult a swimming pool shop on how to flocculate the pool water to precipitate and remove the suspended colloidal soil material. The flocculated material should be vacuumed to waste and not filtered. Once the pool has been flocculated the pool filter should be turned back on to circulate and filter the water. Sufficient (check the label) liquid chlorine (sodium hypochlorite) should be gradually added to the pool to raise the free chlorine concentration to 5mg/L and the pH to 7.2 at least overnight with the filter running. Once this has been achieved normal pool operation can be re-instated. If salt-water chlorination is used then the salt concentration should be then readjusted.

For further information contact your local pool shop, Local Council, Water Safety Branch or Environmental Health Program.