**Be aware of health risks lurking in floodwaters**

Queenslanders in flood affected areas of Far North Queensland are reminded to be aware of the health and safety risks hidden in floodwaters.

Queensland Chief Health Officer Dr John Gerrard said floodwaters are commonly contaminated by sewerage and debris and carry an increased risk of disease and infection.

“Contaminated floodwater and mud can carry an increased risk of wound infections, diarrhoea, conjunctivitis, ear, nose and throat infections and other infections such as leptospirosis and melioidosis,” Dr Gerrard said.

“It’s important to avoid walking or wading through floodwater and mud as much as possible. This is especially important if you have any broken skin or wounds,” Dr Gerrard said.

“People should see their doctor as soon as possible if you have a cut or wound that becomes dirty, red or sore, or if it is deep,” he said.

Leptospirosis and melioidosis is most common in tropical and subtropical areas during the wet season and can potentially cause serious illness.

“The bacteria can enter the body through skin cuts or abrasions or through the lining of the mouth, nose, and eyes by exposure to water, soil or mud contaminated with the urine from infected animals,” Dr Gerrard said.

“Symptoms of leptospirosis may include fever, severe headache, muscle aches, chills, vomiting, and red eyes, and usually develop after five to 14 days following infection. If you experience these symptoms, please consult your doctor.

“To try and avoid nasty infections during and after flooding, people should regularly wash their hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitiser, especially after having contact with damaged material, floodwater or mud or before preparing or eating food.”

Dr Gerrard added that some flood affected areas had been issued with boil water notices.

“Flooding can impact community water infrastructure and supply, and several local Councils have issued boil water notices across flood impacted areas,” Dr Gerrard said.

“This is a rapidly evolving situation, and more areas may be added as the flooding event continues and I encourage residents to check Council websites and social media pages for the latest updates.

“If there is a boil water notice, boil water for drinking, brushing teeth, washing and preparing food or drinks, preparing baby formula and making ice.”

Dr Gerrard also reminded residents in affected areas to be mindful of food safety once floodwaters recede.

“Once the waters recede, ensuring safe food consumption will be paramount,” he said.

“Food, liquids or medicines that have come into contact with contaminated floodwater can make you ill and should be thrown out.

“Any perishable food that has been left unrefrigerated or above 5°C for more than four hours should be thrown out, and do not re-freeze any partially thawed food.

“Any items made from porous material such as wood or porous plastic, including wooden chopping boards, that have come into contact with floodwaters should also be thrown out.

“Any canned food where the can is open, swollen, damaged, or has a missing or damaged label should also be thrown out.

All hospital and emergency departments across the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service are open, however some appointments and procedures have been postponed and will be rescheduled.

This includes outpatient appointments and some elective surgery. Affected patients have been contacted.

In Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service, the Public Health Community Centre at Wujal Wujal has been evacuated following severe flash flooding and is not operational.

Staff from the community centre are now safe and will be evacuated out of Wujal Wujal as soon as possible.

**ENDS**