

Floodwaters and Pets

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Pets should be prevented from entering or drinking floodwaters.

It is natural for dogs to play in surface water. Pet owners should be aware that floodwaters, however, can be extremely dangerous. Unexpected currents and hidden entanglements are some of the risks. Also, floodwaters may contain dangerous pathogens (disease-causing agents).

Caretakers of animals should take certain precautions:

- Pets with health problems, especially heart and lung problems, or that are obese may have difficulty swimming. Take extra care to keep these animals away from floodwaters.
- Some dogs are slow to “learn” to swim. Owners should not assume that all dogs are excellent swimmers.
- If a pet appears to be struggling in floodwaters, remove the animal or assist the animal in exiting the body of water. People should be careful, however, not to put themselves at risk. **DO NOT PUT YOURSELF AT RISK OF BEING BITTEN!** If the animal cannot be safely and/or easily assisted, call the local animal control authority.
 - Signs of struggle include:
 - The pet’s head going underwater
 - Anxious facial expressions
 - Excessive panting
- Always bathe your pet with a mild pet shampoo after it is exposed to floodwaters. If no shampoo is available, dish soap can be used, but care should be taken not get the shampoo or dish soap in the pet’s eyes. Fully rinse the shampoo or dish soap out of the pet’s hair. This procedure can prevent skin infections and remove floodwater contaminants from your pet’s hair. When possible, wear protective clothing such as rain coats, boots, and safety glasses to protect yourself from floodwater as pets shake during the bathing process.
- Dogs exposed to floodwaters should be vaccinated against a disease called Leptospirosis. This vaccine is available at most veterinary practices. Make sure your pet is up-to-date on vaccines such as rabies and Leptospirosis.
- If your pet has ingested floodwater, vomiting or diarrhea may result. Seek veterinary care if this occurs.
- Skin abrasions and lacerations can occur if pets are swimming in floodwater with debris. Seek veterinary care if this occurs.

Information provided by state public health veterinarian, Dr. Gary Balsamo (Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals), Dr. Renée Poirrier (Acadiana Veterinary Clinic & Director, Louisiana State Animal Response Team), and Dr. Martha Littlefield (Louisiana State University School of Veterinary Medicine).