

# NWSF flooding safety advice document



Developed and created by the NWSF Inland Advisory Group and NWSF Comms Advisory Group.  
Special thanks to:



# Water safety during flooding (flowing water and surface water)

## Check your area for flood risk:

- [England](#)
- [Wales](#)
- [Scotland](#)
- [Northern Ireland](#)

## Why is the risk of flood an issue?

Flooding risk is increasing due to climate change<sup>1</sup> and it's increasingly likely that the UK will experience more frequent flooding.

There are growing numbers of community flood resilience groups<sup>2</sup> across the UK to help communities prepare for a flood<sup>3</sup>. However, it's vital that individuals are aware of how to keep themselves safe during flooding.

---

## Facts about flood water

- Flood water is very cold, even in the summer, and you could suffer cold water shock<sup>4</sup>. Also, the water could be faster flowing than you think. So, don't enter the water for any reason.
- Fast-flowing water is powerful. At just ankle depth, it can knock you off your feet<sup>5</sup>. In high-risk areas, the depth of water can increase rapidly.
- Flood water may contain moving debris that could trip you up, cut or injure you.
- Flood water is treated as contaminated by the Fire and Rescue Services. Contaminants include sewage, animal waste, E. coli, Shigella, and agricultural and industrial waste.



## Before you set off on a journey when there's been heavy rain or flooding:

- check the weather forecast from the Met Office and pay attention to the advice.
- check with the Canal & River Trust for any issues on your local canal or river, and the government's flood warning information service<sup>6</sup> and updates on river conditions<sup>7</sup>.



## Flooded inland towpaths, footpaths and land adjacent to water

- If the towpath or pathway next to water has flooded, find another route.
- Don't walk, run or cycle into flood water.
- Don't walk on flooded footpaths, even if you're familiar with the path, as there could be unseen hazards under the water, such as debris, potholes or dislodged drain covers. Flood water can break up the surface of towpaths, loosening stones and surfaces, and exposing utility cables.
- Riverbanks can be quickly eroded by flood water, washing away previously safe paths. They may also be unstable after flooding has subsided.
- If your dog jumps or falls into flood water, don't attempt to go in after it. Stand on the bank in an easy place for the dog to get out and call its name – it should swim to you. If you're close to flood water, keep your dog on a lead.



---

## Road-surface flooding and flash floods

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)<sup>9</sup> projects that the UK will get wetter over the coming decades. It's not only the total amount of rainfall that will increase, but also the amount of heavy rainfall. This will increase the risk of surface-water flooding and flash floods.

- If possible, don't travel when there are flood warnings.
- Carry an emergency flood kit<sup>9</sup> in your car and have one in your home. If a road is flooded, don't drive through the water. You don't know the depth, can't see any debris under the surface, and don't know how quickly the water is rising. It takes just 30cm of water, up to the wheel nuts, for a car to float.
- In a flash flood, the water is flowing. The current will be much stronger than you think and could knock you off your feet.
- Even in the summer, flood water is cold. Don't get in the water. Flood water could also be electrically charged if power lines are down.
- If your vehicle is trapped by flood water but the wheels are still on the ground, and you can make your way to safety, do so immediately. If you can't safely leave your vehicle, call 999 and ask for the Fire and Rescue Service.
- Remember that there will likely be sewage in flood water, so don't drink it.
- Stay out of the water and don't allow children to play in it.

**During flooding incidents, the Fire and Rescue Service is extremely busy, and its resources are stretched. Call them only if your life is at risk. Don't put yourself at risk by trying to move your car out of flood waters.**

**Fire and Rescue Services will not assist in the recovery of your vehicle from flood water. Call your roadside recovery provider.**

## If you fall into flood water

Falling into fast-moving flood water is extremely dangerous.

- Flood water is very cold, and you'll be exposed to the 'cold water shock' response. Don't try to swim – 'float to live'<sup>10</sup> until your breathing has calmed down.
- Float on your back with your feet up, pointing downstream. This position will allow you to push away debris.
- Use back stroke to help you get across the flow of the water. While on your back, keep your feet and bottom up to avoid any underwater hazards.



Image used with kind permission from Surf Life Saving GB

Never put your feet down until you are at the side. Once at the side take your time to get out and call 999 and ask for the coastguard at the coast and Fire and Rescue Service inland.

## Causeway crossing and flooding


Never drive through flood water at the coast. Slow down on wet and winding coastal roads and never try to beat the tide<sup>11</sup> when crossing causeways.

- Always check the tide times and heights and keep a look out for the incoming tide. If you're unsure, check with the harbour master if there is one.
- Use tide timetables. Make sure you've enough time to return safely. If in doubt, ask for advice locally.
- Always carry a phone. Make sure your phone is fully charged.
- Call 999 and ask for the Coastguard if you're in danger at the coast or you see someone in danger of being cut off by the tide.
- Tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back. They can raise the alarm with the Coastguard by calling 999 if you don't return on time.
- Driving through flood water is the number one cause of death during flooding – so, turn around and take a different route.
- Always check tide times and make sure you get back in plenty of time if driving across causeways to ensure a safe crossing – never underestimate the rate of the incoming tide.
- Listen to local safety advice and take note of warning signs and road closures. If you do get stranded on a causeway, or in trouble at the coast, call 999 and ask for the Coastguard.

## Stormy weather at the coast

If the weather and conditions look bad for your trip to the coast, stay at home and reschedule your trip. If in doubt, don't take risks.

- Stormy weather can make our seas particularly dangerous and unpredictable. Large, unexpected waves and swells are a major risk and can catch anyone out.
- Beware – the coastline is exceptionally treacherous during storms. The large swell means that areas normally accessible at low tide can be cut off by storm surges. Sea walls and harbour areas can be battered by large waves, and walkways flooded with significant volumes of water.
- The power of waves can take you by surprise, knocking you off your feet. In some open areas, waves can take you out to sea.
- Stay away from breaking waves and flooded areas – avoid exposed beaches, cliffs, coastal paths, promenades and harbours, where large waves can sweep you out to sea in an instant.
- Risking your life for a photo is always a 'no' – don't ever be tempted to stand near a cliff edge especially during bad weather, when they're less stable and slippery.
- Keep a safe distance from the sea.



For more information on preparing for flooding, how to protect your home, and dealing with the aftermath of flooding, visit RoSPA's Flood Hub<sup>12</sup> and the National Flood Forum<sup>13</sup>.

# Always remember to #RespectTheWater

1 [www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/climate/understanding-climate/uk-and-global-extreme-events-heavy-rainfall-and-floods](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/research/climate/understanding-climate/uk-and-global-extreme-events-heavy-rainfall-and-floods)

2 [nationalfloodforum.org.uk/working-together/community-engagement-hub/](http://nationalfloodforum.org.uk/working-together/community-engagement-hub/)

3 [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/292939/LIT\\_5286\\_b9ff43.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/292939/LIT_5286_b9ff43.pdf)

4 [rnli.org/safety/know-the-risks/cold-water-shock](http://rnli.org/safety/know-the-risks/cold-water-shock)

5 [www.theaa.com/driving-advice/seasonal/driving-through-flood-water](http://www.theaa.com/driving-advice/seasonal/driving-through-flood-water)

6 [check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/](http://check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk/)

7 [www.gov.uk/check-river-conditions-and-closures](http://www.gov.uk/check-river-conditions-and-closures)

8 [www.carbonbrief.org/how-much-flooding-is-in-the-uks-future-a-look-at-the-ipcc-report](http://www.carbonbrief.org/how-much-flooding-is-in-the-uks-future-a-look-at-the-ipcc-report)

9 [nationalfloodforum.org.uk/about-flooding/preparing/emergency-flood-kit/](http://nationalfloodforum.org.uk/about-flooding/preparing/emergency-flood-kit/)

10 [rnli.org/safety/float](http://rnli.org/safety/float)

11 [s2.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/24/DYiYmaADwR44urDYA9sDZgcFXE/MARITIME-2.mp4](https://s2.chorus-mk.thirdlight.com/file/24/DYiYmaADwR44urDYA9sDZgcFXE/MARITIME-2.mp4)

12 [www.rospace.com/resources/hubs/flood](http://www.rospace.com/resources/hubs/flood)

13 [nationalfloodforum.org.uk/](http://nationalfloodforum.org.uk/)