

Staying healthy during the 2011 flood fight

3 R's can help lessen emotional toll

Flinging sandbags, moving furniture and other flood fighting measures clearly affect a person physically, but flooding and other natural disasters can take an emotional toll as well.


The stress that is part of responding to a difficult situation can produce symptoms such as changes in appetite, trouble sleeping, fatigue, irritability, apathy, anxiety or depression, said Dr. Mark Doerner, one of Medcenter One's clinical psychologists. Children may also exhibit behavioral and emotional changes and can become "clingy," have problems going to sleep and worry more about the safety of loved ones. Some children may become quiet and withdrawn, and others may act out in response to the enduring tension and the disruption of familiar routines, Dr. Doerner said.

"All these reactions are a normal response to an abnormal situation," Dr. Doerner said, "And how a person responds to stress is an individual matter."

To help cope, Dr. Doerner urges everyone to remember three R's: rest, routine and relationships.

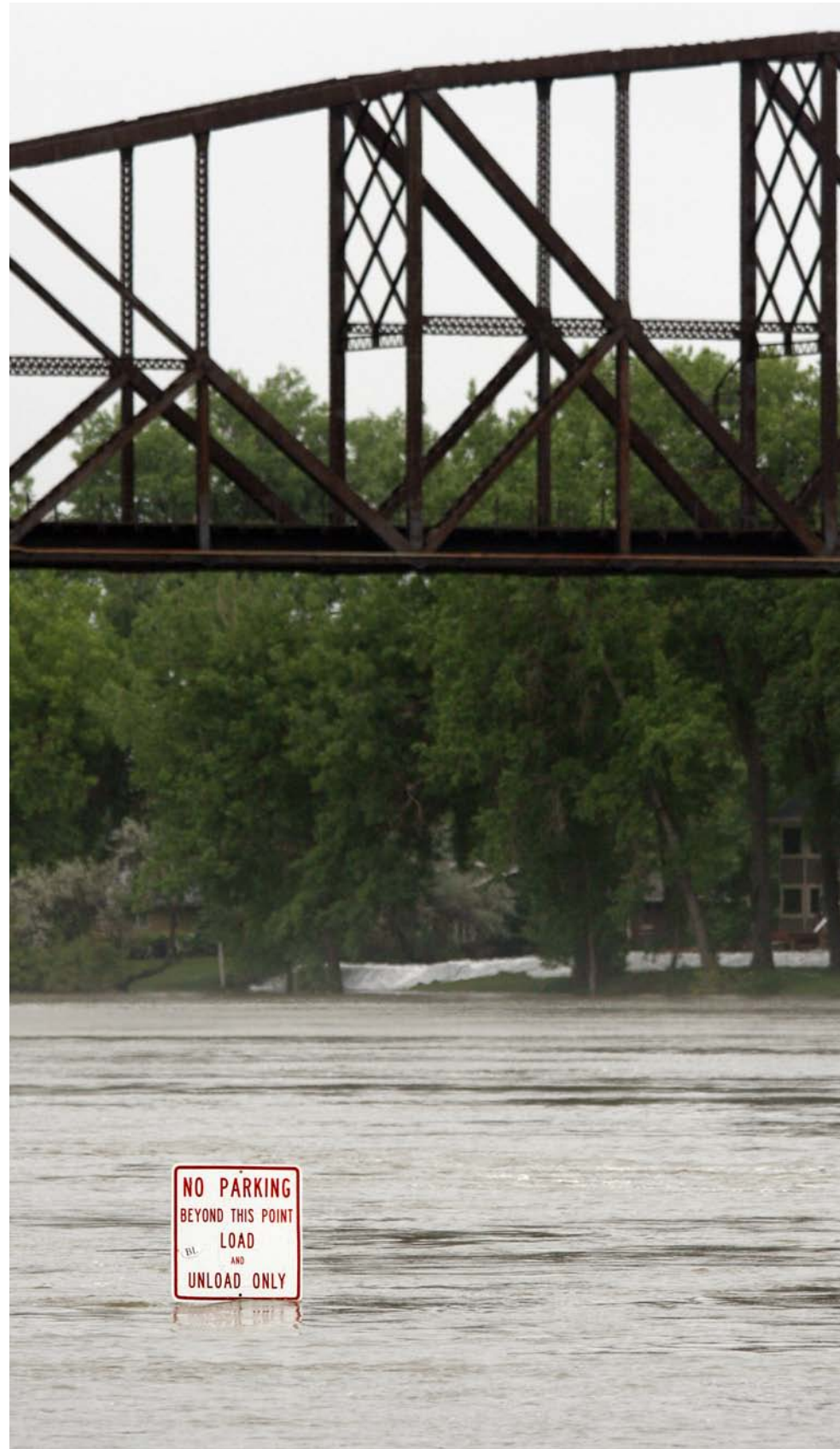
- Rest extends beyond getting a good night's sleep. It includes exercise (not related to flood efforts) and proper nutrition.
- Routine provides a sense of normalcy and is especially important for children. Keep doing as many normal activities as possible.
- Relationships keep people connected and provide an avenue to share feelings and experiences. Accept help others offer while doing what you can to help others.

The psychological effects of disasters can linger for weeks after the event is over, Dr. Doerner said, adding that people should seek help from a doctor or mental health professional if symptoms become debilitating or life-threatening, if symptoms persist at a high level for a month or longer after the disaster or if symptoms grow progressively worse.

For additional information, visit redriverresilience.com, a website inspired by the past flood emergencies in the Red River Valley. 



Dr. Mark Doerner
Clinical psychologist
Medcenter One
Mental Health Center



Consider updating your tetanus vaccination


From planning and protecting, to the cleanup afterward, those involved with the local flood fight are encouraged to update their tetanus vaccination.

"If you have not updated your tetanus vaccination in the past 10 years, you should consider doing so now," said Dr. Kent Martin, a Medcenter One infectious disease specialist. "In battling the water and the cleanup that follows, there is an increased risk for minor cuts and injuries. Wounds can become contaminated by bacteria in the water. Some of the bacteria can cause a disease called tetanus, more commonly known as lockjaw."

Lockjaw is actually caused by a protein made by a bacterium called Clostridium, and it causes spasms in the muscles. It is rare but often lethal. Immunization can prevent this but needs to be occasionally updated.

"As health professionals," Dr. Martin said, "we strongly encourage everyone to be proactive in protecting themselves from this potentially devastating disease."

Medcenter One makes getting a tetanus update easy and convenient. People can go to any of Medcenter One's no-appointment-necessary walk-in clinics, which are open days, evenings, weekends and holidays or make an appointment with your doctor.

Visit medcenterone.com/tetanus for more information. 

As part of its ongoing efforts to serve the community, Medcenter One has created a new web page devoted to flood-related health tips and news. On the page—medcenterone.com/flood2011—Medcenter One experts provide answers to flood-related health questions. The health system also will provide timely updates on its services if they are affected by flooding.



Dr. Kent Martin
Infectious disease specialist
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