

PREVENTION AND CURE: HEALTH SECTOR RESPONSES TO FLOODING

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Flooding poses multiple risks to human health. In the context of the additional threats from climate change, it is vital to improve our understanding of the health-related responses to floods and, in particular, to analyse the challenges, constraints and opportunities for flood preparedness within the health sector. Drawing on existing work about health and floods in Asia, and on new empirical research about health-related responses to flooding in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam, our paper describes some health sector coping mechanisms and associated challenges for adaptation. It takes a broad approach to health sector responses, covers aspects of preventive and curative health both within and beyond the formal health system, and recognises that efforts in health promotion, water/sanitation provision and protection of health infrastructure are all closely related. It finds that, as for other sectors, greater preparedness can play a crucial role in health risk reduction in two ways: by reducing the vulnerability of the public to the short- and long-term health impacts of floods; and by reducing the vulnerability of the health services to the damage and disruption caused by floods. It also emphasizes that long-term risk reduction rests on effective integration of the health sector with other sectors and the involvement of communities in the design and implementation of health protection activities.
