

FLOODING HEALTH AND SAFETY TIPS

Water Safety

When in doubt, if the water is **CLOUDY, ODOROUS, COLORED - DO NOT DRINK THE WATER!** Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, or make ice. Drink bottled water, if available, or to make water safe do one of the following:

- 1) Boiling: Bring water to a rolling boil for one minute.
- 2) Bleach: Add household bleach (4-6%), using two to four drops per quart, or 1/4 teaspoon per gallon of water, shake and let stand for 30 minutes. Water is now safe to drink.
- 3) Sediment: Strain cloudy water by pouring through a clean tightly woven cloth, then disinfect following the above procedures.

Do NOT swim or bathe in rivers, streams, creeks, or lakes in flooded areas!

Food Safety

- 1) When in doubt, do not eat suspicious food.
- 2) Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water. Discard any food without a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water. Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if you remove the can labels, thoroughly wash the cans, and then disinfect them with a solution consisting of one cup of bleach in 5 gallons of water. Re-label your cans, including expiration date, with a marker. Food containers with screw-caps, snap-lids, crimped caps (soda pop bottles), twist caps, flip tops, and home canned foods should be discarded if they have come into contact with flood water because they cannot be disinfected. For infants, use **only** pre-prepared canned baby formula that requires no added water, rather than powdered formulas prepared with treated water.
- 3) If your refrigerator or freezer has been without power for a period of time, all stored items should be carefully checked. Perishable food left at room temperature for more than two hours should be discarded. Frozen foods that have thawed should be discarded if not consumed immediately or kept refrigerated.
- 4) Questions should be directed to local public health or extension agent.

Human Waste Precautions

1) If water and sewage disposal are not working, use portable toilets, or facilities at the emergency site.

2) Sewage may back flow from your septic or municipal system through floor drains into basements. This area must be disinfected with a chlorine solution. If this has happened, anything that cannot be cleaned should be discarded.

Garbage Precautions

Place household garbage, like food waste, in waterproof containers. Local areas will have disposal sites that should be used. It is important to remove household garbage every four days during the disaster. Garbage can attract animals and disease-bearing insects, if possible store in a rigid container.

Injury Prevention

1) Electrical Safety:

Do not attempt to restore or work on power sources without first contacting your utility.

Avoid all downed power lines, especially those in water. Emergency generators must be used in well ventilated areas.

2) Physical Hazards

Avoid wading in water without proper foot protection. Broken glass, metal fragments, and other debris may be submerged in the flooded area.

Wear proper eyewear, gloves, and other protective equipment when cleaning up an area.

Boats should be used with caution. Submerged items such as signs, fences, etc. may not be visible and can result in serious injury.

3) Insects:

Wear Insect Repellent when out of doors. Mosquitoes and other insects may transmit diseases.

Remove any standing water from artificial containers, such as tires, dishes, cans, or building material.

4) Animals:

Beware of wild animals, such as raccoons and skunks. Rabies is always a concern in these types of animals.

Also avoid dogs and cats you do not know. If bitten by any animal, contact your primary health care provider or local public health.

If you have evacuated your home, animals may have sheltered in your home, garage, or other buildings. Carefully inspect your buildings before reoccupying.

5) Wounds:

If you are wounded or punctured, contact your physician or local health department as soon as possible. Tetanus vaccinations may be necessary.

Future Concerns

A major health concern after flooding or other water damage in homes is the growth of molds, bacteria, and other biological contaminants. This is often associated with a musty mildew odor, as well as visible evidence of mold growth on walls, floors, carpeting, or other water damaged items. Some persons may be allergic to or develop allergies or asthma-like symptoms from exposure to these contaminants.

It is important that items in a home contributing to mold and bacterial growth be cleaned and dried as soon as possible. See item(s) below. If this is not possible the item(s) should be discarded. The following are provided as general recommendations for dealing with water damage.

Correcting Water Damage

Seal all leaks (ceilings, walls, foundations) and correct improper surface drainage. Reduce moisture generation in crawl spaces by ventilation or covering the crawl space floor with a moisture resistant material such as polyethylene.

Discard any water-damaged furnishings such as carpet, drapes, stuffed toys, upholstered furniture, mattresses, wicker furniture, ceiling tiles, and other porous items unless they can be cleaned by steam cleaning or hot water washing and thorough drying. Remove and replace wet insulation to prevent conditions where biological pollutants can grow.

Wash surfaces and floors with a household chlorine bleach solution. Use 4 ounces of bleach per gallon of water. The bleach solution should stay in contact with the affected surface for at least fifteen minutes before rinsing off with clean water. Only individuals necessary for cleanup should be in the affected areas.

Persons with respiratory health problems (e.g., asthma, emphysema) should NOT perform the clean up. Children and pets should not be allowed in these areas. When using a bleach solution, open windows to provide good ventilation. **Boots and rubber gloves should be worn at all times.** In cases where rigorous

splashing of contaminated water may occur, a dust mask and eye protection should also be worn.

Home Inspection after Water Damage

Inspect and clean all appliances that have been in contact water.
Have professionals check heating/cooling ducts and wall insulation for mold growth.

Look for obvious mold growth through out the house including attics, basements and crawlspace and around the foundation.

If you have questions contact Richland County Health & Human Services Public Health at: 647-8821 or the Bureau of Public Health Regional Office at: (608) 243-2351.