

Know the FACTS

Cleaning Up After a Flood

Flooding can create many safety issues for residents and business owners, including bacteria, fecal material, viruses and other organisms that cause disease. When cleaning up after a flood, consider the tips below in order to reduce risks to your health.

General cleaning and safety

- Turn off main power switches. Air out and wipe dry all appliances and electrical outlets exposed to water before use.
- Wash hands frequently when working in contaminated areas or cleaning affected items.
- Open all windows for drying and ventilation. Use electric fans.
- If you have fuel oil or gas systems, be sure tanks are secure and all lines are free from breaks.
- Discard food exposed to flood waters, including items in refrigerators or freezers that have taken in flood waters. Discard all thawed foods (including meats and vegetables) as well as partially thawed foods that won't be immediately prepared. Discard milk, cheeses and other foods prone to spoilage. Discard all bulging or leaking canned food.
- Flood waters can carry microorganisms and other contaminants, so keep flood waters away from your mouth, nose, eyes and skin, if possible. Prevent children from playing in contaminated water. Wash and sanitize all contaminated utensils and cookware.
- Discard or properly wash and disinfect toys, clothing and other contaminated objects. If available, use the city water supply, which is chlorinated adequately to provide mild disinfection. Use cold tap water with soap, as boiling the water will eliminate the chlorine content.
- Sanitize floors and other surfaces touched by flood waters with a solution of 1 tablespoon of household liquid bleach per 1 gallon of water. Read and follow label instructions on bleach. Never mix cleaning products.

- Take curtains and draperies to a reputable dry cleaner.
- Clean carpets with light contamination exposure in place with a mild detergent; carpets cleaned after removal nearly always shrink beyond recovery. Remove carpets and rugs with severe exposure for thorough cleaning.
- Remove silt accumulated on carpet liner. Generally, the carpet liner must be discarded because it cannot be cleaned adequately. If you prefer, call a reputable carpet cleaner.

Prevent or eliminate flood-related mold

- Mold and mildew are fungi that grow on, and sometimes within, surfaces. They can cause discoloration and odor problems, deteriorate building materials, and lead to health problems such as asthma episodes and allergic reactions in susceptible individuals.
- Look for signs of mold, which can grow and spread quickly. Be aware of potential problem areas and correct them as soon as possible.
- Damp basements, closets and bathrooms with little ventilation are ideal environments for mold and mildew growth.
- Reduce humidity and temperature in spaces where mold may grow. Open windows and doors if the outside humidity is lower. Install and use dehumidifiers, remembering to empty them often. Increase ventilation by using fans to increase circulation and speed up drying .
- Dry and brush off objects affected by mold or clean with disinfectant products. Visit cdc.gov for mold-preventing cleaning solution ratios.



Clean sewage backups safely

- Removing and cleaning up sewer water is essential to health and safety, as bacteria, fecal material, viruses and other organisms can cause disease.
- Sanitary sewers may flood during heavy rain through blockage in a private sewer line, blockage in public sanitary sewer line, or plumbing problems in gutters, down spouts or sump pumps connected to sanitary sewers.
- Wear rubber boots and gloves during removal or cleanup.
- Avoid skin contact with sewer water. Keep cuts and sores clean and covered.
- Do not allow children to play in areas contaminated by sewage backup.
- Wash hands frequently and immediately, especially after using the bathroom, before eating and after contact with sewer water or contaminated objects/surfaces.
- Odors from sewage backups are unpleasant but not harmful.

Find more information and resources here:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
cdc.gov/natural-disasters/safety

Ohio Department of Health: odh.ohio.gov/knownour-programs/healthy-homes/emergency-flood-cleanup-and-mold

Environmental Protection Agency: epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/resources-flood-cleanup-and-indoor-air-quality

Occupational Safety and Health Administration:
osha.gov/flood/response



Home with major damage



Moderate mold damage



Minor water damage

Important safety reminders:



Wear personal protective equipment. Wear at least an N-95 respirator, goggles, and protective gloves.



Open windows or doors when using any cleaning products.



Never mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleanser.



Children should not be involved in disaster clean-up.



Have your home heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning system (HVAC) checked and cleaned by a service professional experienced in mold clean-up before you turn it on. If the system was flooded with water, turning it on will spread mold throughout the house.



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Additional resources and flood updates:

Hamilton County Emergency Management & Homeland Security Agency: bit.ly/HCEMAHome



**HAMILTON COUNTY
PUBLIC HEALTH**

250 William Howard Taft Road, 2nd Floor, Cincinnati, OH 45219
Phone 513.946.7800 Fax 513.946.7890
hamiltoncountyhealth.org • Social Media: HamCoHealth