
After a Flood

Precautions When Returning to Your Home

Electrical power and natural gas or propane tanks should be shut off to avoid fire, electrocution, or explosions. Try to return to your home during the daytime so that you do not have to use any lights. Use battery-powered flashlights and lanterns, rather than candles, gas lanterns, or torches. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open all windows, and leave the house immediately. Notify the gas company or the police or fire departments or State Fire Marshal's office, and do not turn on the lights or do anything that could cause a spark. Do not return to the house until you are told it is safe to do so.

Your electrical system may also be damaged. If you see frayed wiring or sparks, or if there is an odor of something burning but no visible fire, you should immediately shut off the electrical system at the circuit breaker.

Avoid any downed power lines, particularly those in water. Avoid wading in standing water, which also may contain glass or metal fragments.



You should consult your utility company about using electrical equipment, including power generators. Be aware that it is against the law and a violation of electrical codes to connect generators to your home's electrical circuits without the approved, automatic-interrupt devices. If a generator is on line when electrical service is restored, it can become a major fire hazard. In addition, the improper connection of a generator to your home's electrical circuits may endanger line workers helping to restore power in your area. All electrical equipment and appliances must be completely dry before returning them to service. It is advisable to have a certified electrician check these items if there is any question. Also, remember not to operate any gas-powered equipment indoors.

Cleanup

Walls, hard-surfaced floors, and many other household surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water and disinfected with a solution of 1 cup of bleach to five gallons of water. Be particularly careful to thoroughly disinfect surfaces that may come in contact with food, such as counter tops, pantry shelves, refrigerators, etc. Areas where small children play should also be carefully cleaned. Wash all linens and clothing in hot water, or dry clean them. For items that cannot be washed or dry cleaned, such as mattresses and upholstered furniture, air dry them in the sun and then spray them thoroughly with a disinfectant. Steam clean all carpeting. If there has been a backflow of sewage into the house, wear rubber boots and

waterproof gloves during cleanup. Remove and discard contaminated household materials that cannot be disinfected, such as wallcoverings, cloth, rugs, and drywall.

Immunizations

Outbreaks of communicable diseases after floods are unusual. However, the rates of diseases that were present before a flood may increase because of decreased sanitation or overcrowding among displaced persons. Increases in infectious diseases that were not present in the community before the flood are not usually a problem. If you receive a puncture wound or a wound contaminated with feces, soil, or saliva, have a doctor or health department determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary based on individual records.



Specific recommendations for vaccinations should be made on a case-by-case basis, or as determined by local and state health departments.

Swiftly Flowing Water

If you enter swiftly flowing water, you risk drowning -- regardless of your ability to swim. Swiftly moving shallow water can be deadly, and even shallow standing water can be dangerous for small children. Cars or other vehicles do not provide adequate protection from flood waters. Cars can be swept away or may break down in moving water.

Chemical Hazards

Use extreme caution when returning to your area after a flood. Be aware of potential chemical hazards you may encounter during flood recovery. Flood waters may have buried or moved hazardous chemical containers of solvents or other industrial chemicals from their normal storage places.

If any propane tanks (whether 20-lb. tanks from a gas grill or household propane tanks) are discovered, do not attempt to move them yourself. These represent a very real danger of fire or explosion, and if any are found, police or fire departments or your State Fire Marshal's office should be contacted immediately.



Car batteries, even those in flood water, may still contain an electrical charge and should be removed with extreme caution by using insulated gloves. Avoid coming in contact with any acid that may have spilled from a damaged car battery.

Protect Yourself from Animal- and Insect-Related Hazards After a Disaster

HIGHLIGHTS

- Avoid wild or stray animals.
- Protect yourself from mosquitoes by using insect repellents that contain DEET or Picaridin.
- To avoid attracting rodents, remove potential sources of food, water, and shelter such as garbage, dirty dishes, and debris.
- Be aware of snakes that may be swimming in the water to get to higher ground and those that may be hiding under debris or other objects.

General

- Avoid wild or stray animals.
- Call local authorities to handle animals.
- Secure all food sources and remove any animal carcasses to avoid attracting rats.
- Get rid of dead animals, according to guidelines from your local animal control authority, as soon as you can. See Animal Disposal for answers to frequently asked questions.

For guidance on caring for animals entering shelters and for people working with or handling animals following an emergency, see [Interim Guidelines for Animal Health and Control of Disease Transmission in Pet Shelters](#).

For more information, contact your local animal shelter or services, a veterinarian, or the Humane Society for advice on dealing with pets or stray or wild animals after an emergency. Also see [Resources for Planning How to Protect Your Pets in an Emergency](#).

Avoid Mosquitoes

- Rain and flooding in a hurricane area may lead to an increase in numbers of mosquitoes, which can carry diseases, such as West Nile virus or dengue fever. In most cases, the mosquitoes will be pests but will not carry communicable diseases. Local, state, and federal public health authorities will be actively working to control the spread of any mosquito-borne diseases. For more information on West Nile virus, see [CDC's West Nile virus Web site](#).



- To protect yourself from mosquitoes, use screens on dwellings; wear long pants, socks, and long-sleeved shirts; and use insect repellents that contain DEET or Picaridin. Follow directions on the product label and

take care when using DEET on small children. More information about these and other recommended repellents can be found in the fact sheet Updated Information Regarding Insect Repellents.

- To help control mosquito populations, drain all standing water left outdoors in open containers, such as flower pots, tires, pet dishes, or buckets.

Prevent Contact With Rodents

- Remove food sources, water, and items that can provide shelter for rodents.
- Wash dishes, pans, and cooking utensils immediately after use.
- Dispose of garbage and debris as soon as possible.

Prevent or Respond to a Snake Bite

- Be aware of snakes that may be swimming in the water to get to higher ground and those that may be hiding under debris or other objects.
- If you see a snake, back away from it slowly and do not touch it.
- If you or someone you know are bitten, try to see and remember the color and shape of the snake, which can help with treatment of the snake bite.
- Keep the bitten person still and calm. This can slow down the spread of venom if the snake is poisonous. Seek medical attention as soon as possible. Dial 911 or call local Emergency Medical Services. Apply first aid if you cannot get the person to the hospital right away.
 - Lay or sit the person down with the bite below the level of the heart.
 - Tell him/her to stay calm and still.
 - Cover the bite with a clean, dry dressing.

Sanitation and Hygiene After a Flood

It is critical for you to remember to practice basic hygiene during the emergency period. Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected:

- before preparing or eating food;
- after toilet use;
- after participating in flood cleanup activities; and
- after handling articles contaminated with flood water or sewage.



Flood waters may contain fecal material from overflowing sewage systems, and agricultural and industrial byproducts. Although skin contact with flood water does not, by itself, pose a serious health risk, there is some risk of disease from eating or drinking anything contaminated with flood water. If you have any open cuts or sores that will be exposed to flood water, keep them as clean as possible by washing well with soap to control infection. If a wound develops redness, swelling, or drainage, seek immediate medical attention.

In addition, parents need to help children avoid waterborne illness. Do not allow children to play in flood water areas, wash children's hands frequently (always before meals), and do not allow children to play with flood-water contaminated toys that have not been disinfected. You can disinfect toys using a solution of one cup of bleach in 5 gallons of water.

****All information provided by the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention as of 4/6/09**