



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Post-Flood Hazards Rarely Linked to Increase in Illness

*Take all precautions to prevent injury and illness,
stay away from contaminated areas*

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BURLINGTON - The Vermont Department of Health has not seen an increase in gastrointestinal or respiratory illnesses since Tropical Storm Irene hit Vermont on Aug. 28.

Sediment, mud and dust is usually not any more contaminated than the soil that was there before a storm - unless it's near a source of contamination that was disrupted by flooding such as agricultural fertilizers, industrial chemicals or raw sewage. The Health Department advises Vermonters to stay away from contaminated areas that require professional cleanup.

"We do anticipate there will be sporadic or individual cases of respiratory and gastrointestinal illness, but we rarely see outbreaks of these types of illnesses in the wake of flooding in the United States," said Health Commissioner Harry Chen, MD.

Typically in the United States, Dr. Chen said, about half of the hazards after a flood are related to injuries rather than illness, such as injuries from power tools, slips and falls, electrocution and carbon monoxide exposure.

Vermonters are advised to practice good hygiene during cleanup such as washing hands frequently, and make sure items such as canned foods picked up during cleanup are washed thoroughly with soap and water.

Wear an N-95 respirator (also called an N-95 mask) during all clean-up activities when inhalable particles are generated, such as mold, sand, silt, dry dirt or mud, dust or any other particles not otherwise specified. If inhaled, particles alone can cause upper airway and lung irritation and can make asthma and other lung diseases worsen.

Most hardware stores sell N-95 respirators. They are also available at no cost from Health Department district offices as part of the flood response .

For more information, including a link to the nearest Health Department district office and guidance on safe clean up of flood sediment and soil, visit healthvermont.gov.

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