



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Flood Water May Contain Sewage: Take Precautions

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BURLINGTON - Flood water may be contaminated with sewage or other hazards, so everyone in a flooded area should take precautions to avoid exposure, especially during cleanup. You can be exposed to sewage through hand-to-mouth contact such as eating or drinking, or through cuts, scratches or wounds, or by wiping your face or eyes with contaminated hands or gloves.

If there has been a backflow of sewage into your home or on your property, it is best to have a professional handle the cleanup. Raw sewage can contain bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites that can cause serious illness. For any cleanup of flood water that may contain sewage, take the following precautions to prevent illness. For most purposes, use a disinfectant solution of no more than ½ cup bleach to 1 gallon of water.

- Keep children and pets out of the area until cleanup has been completed.
- Do not allow children to play in floodwaters or with items that may have been contaminated.
- Wear rubber boots, waterproof gloves and goggles during cleanup.
- If you have open cuts or sores that could be exposed to floodwater, keep them as clean as possible by washing with soap and applying an antibiotic ointment to discourage infection.
- During cleanup properly vent the space when using cleaning products.
- Do not mix ammonia cleansers with bleach - toxic vapors will form.
- Remove and discard contaminated household materials that cannot be washed and disinfected (such as mattresses, carpeting, carpet padding, rugs, upholstered furniture, cosmetics, stuffed animals, baby toys, pillows, foam-rubber items, books, wall coverings and most paper products).
- Remove and discard drywall and insulation that has been contaminated with sewage or flood waters.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect all hard surfaces (such as flooring, concrete, molding, wood and metal furniture, countertops, appliances, sinks and other plumbing fixtures) with a bleach solution of no more than ½ cup of bleach per gallon of water.
- Once cleanup is complete, dry out the affected items to prevent mold from growing.
- Help the drying process by using fans, air conditioning units and dehumidifiers.
- After completing the cleanup, wash your hands with soap and warm water.
- Use water that has been boiled for 1 minute (allow the water to cool before washing your hands). OR use water that has been disinfected for personal hygiene (Make a solution of 1/8 tsp. household bleach per 1 gallon of water. Let it stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy use a solution of 1/4 tsp bleach per 1 gallon water.)
- If your home septic system may have been impacted, have it inspected by a professional.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you become injured or ill.

For more extensive health information related to flooding, including food and drinking water safety, go to the Health Department website at healthvermont.gov OR dial 2-1-1. Report property damage related to flooding to 2-1-1.

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