



Flood Cleanup Health Tips

Flood water contains mostly dirt and debris. However, it may contain a very small amount of chemicals or possibly sewage. In the event of a flood, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health advises the following cleanup tips.

Structures and Contents:

- All standing water must first be removed by pumping, mopping, opening clogged drains, etc. Avoid electrical shocks! Do not stand in pools of water unless you know the electricity is turned off to this area.
- Remove and dispose of all wet ceiling tiles, paper products, baseboards, and gypsum board (also known as dry wall) to a level approximately four feet above the flood water line. Also remove wet insulation and materials that absorb water. Carpets may be saved by wet vacuuming, shampooing, and taking steps to assure that the carpet is totally dry.
- After turning off the electricity, all wet light fixtures should be cleaned and thoroughly dry before turning the electricity back on.
- Cabinets and household equipment may be cleaned with soap and water. Next, make a disinfecting solution of 1/4 cup of bleach in one gallon of clean water and wipe down all areas touched by the flood water. Disinfect all contaminated floors and other surfaces and allow to air-dry.
- Open windows and doors (when possible) during cleaning and for at least 24 hours after the cleaning to allow surfaces to thoroughly dry and avoid mold. Use fans or dehumidifiers to shorten drying times.
- Wood and metal studs should be wet wiped with the bleach solution twice and allowed to air dry.
- Clothing and bedding exposed to flood water should first be soaked in clean water to remove any mud. Next, wash in hot water or, if hot water is not available, add a disinfectant such as bleach to the rinse water. Mattresses or other large similar items soaked with flood water probably will have to be discarded. However, if they are made of foam rubber, it may be possible to wash, disinfect and air-dry these items.

Personal Hygiene:

- Do not let children play with wet toys or other items until these have been cleaned and disinfected. This can be done by either wiping them with a diluted bleach solution (described above) or by washing the toys in a dishwasher using hot water.
- People performing the cleanup should observe good personal hygiene procedures by washing their hands after completing cleanup activities and before touching food or beverage items, or smoking. They should wear waterproof gloves and protective clothing that should be discarded or washed after cleanup is completed each day.
- Keep children from playing on lawns and fields until the ground surface has dried.
- Contact your physician or health care provider if you or a family member develops any of the following symptoms within five days: fever greater than 100 degrees, vomiting, diarrhea, and/or severe stomach cramps.
- If you receive a puncture wound or other injury during the flood or while you perform flood cleanup, talk with your health care provider about the need for treatment and/or a tetanus shot.

Medicines, Food and Kitchen Items:

- Discard all medicines and foods in contact with flood water. Throw out all perishable foods that have been out of refrigeration for more than six hours. Do not refreeze frozen foods that have been thawed.
- All cooking and eating utensils, food preparation surfaces, counters and work surfaces that were touched or splashed by flood water should be washed with soap and water and wiped with a diluted bleach solution (described above).

For more information:

If you have other questions, please contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Environmental Engineering Section, Monday-Friday (8 am-4:30 pm) at **(215) 685-7342**.