

## Cleaning up after a Flood

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Flood water is dirty. Assume that the water is contaminated and items that have come into contact with it need to be handled carefully.

### What health hazards are associated with flooding?

During a flood, water washes over land and may come into contact with farmyards, manure, garbage, overflowing septic systems and other sources of contamination and disease. Flood waters can become heavily contaminated and can make people sick if swallowed. It is not safe to live in a home that has been flooded until after the clean-up is complete, a supply of safe water is available, septic systems are working properly, and garbage has been disposed of.

### How do I clean my flooded home and outbuildings?

Thoroughly scrub and clean all surfaces and floors with hot water and detergent as soon as possible after the flood water has receded. In particular, utensils and containers used to prepare, preserve or store food need to be washed and then soaked in a disinfecting solution.

Take movable furnishings outside. Clean all woodwork with soap and water. Leave upholstered furniture outside until completely dry. Direct sunlight can be a strong disinfectant; however, additional cleaning may be necessary.

After surfaces are cleaned, sanitize them with a chlorine bleach solution. Household laundry bleaches containing 5.25% chlorine and can be used by mixing 1 litre of household bleach in 25 litres of water (1 quart of household bleach in 5 gallons of water). Be sure to wear protective gloves, eye protection, boots and an N-95 dust/mist mask (more protective than standard dust masks, but must be fit-tested where purchased).

Don't pump your basement until the flood water in the surrounding area has receded. Disinfect the standing water in the flooded basements. Pour 2 litres of household bleach over any standing water and then stir the bleach and water together; repeat this every 4-5 days for as long as the standing water remains.

When water has receded and you are ready to pump water out of basements, pump it slowly to ensure that pressure from the saturated soil doesn't cause the collapse of foundation walls and/or the uplifting of concrete floors. Once the water has been pumped out, remove any silt and mud right away. Remove all items that have come into contact with the flood water, including furniture, carpet, toys, clothing and other items (anything that show visible signs of mould should be discarded).

To increase air circulation and speed drying, open all windows and use the furnace or a heater if possible. Disinfect all surfaces exposed to flood waters by brushing on a sanitizing solution as described above.

All sheds, garages and other buildings where goods are stored also need to be cleaned and disinfected.

### What about septic tanks and disposal fields?

Flooding can seriously affect your septic system by undermining the soil that supports it. After the flood waters recede and you return home, consult with your local Environmental Health Officer (EHO) and a Registered Onsite Wastewater Practitioner (ROWP), who can provide advice on your septic system. To find an ROWP in your area, visit <http://owrp.asttbc.org/c/finder.php>.