

## Frequently Asked Questions

### – Sewage Contaminated Flood Waters -

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All flood water should be considered contaminated, but if you know you had raw sewage back up into your home, these extra precautions can help keep you safe.

#### What's in sewage?

Raw sewage is heavily polluted and contains harmful germs (disease-causing organisms) such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites. Municipal sewage may also contain industrial effluent and debris. Regardless of the size of the spill, wear protective equipment.

#### How can I be exposed?

You can be exposed in several ways:

1. **Ingestion.** People don't often intentionally drink or eat things that have been exposed to sewage, but sometimes you may touch things that have been exposed to sewage and then touch your mouth or face.
2. **Contact with skin and/or eyes.** Your skin or eyes could get infected if they come into contact with sewage. Your skin is particularly vulnerable if you have existing cuts or scrapes.
3. **Inhalation.** You may be at risk of breathing in enteric viruses if sewage is splashed, or even if the furnace of the house is operating while sewage is on the floor in the immediate area.

#### How do I protect myself?

Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water during and after clean up to prevent hand to mouth contact during eating, drinking and smoking.

In flood situations your drinking water may be impacted, visit the [Drinking Water for Everyone](https://drinkingwaterforeveryone.ca/) (<https://drinkingwaterforeveryone.ca/>) website and check with your local supplier to determine actions that may need to be taken.

Prevent contact with sewage by using Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) if you are cleaning up, or need to work in the contaminated area. Equipment may include waterproof/abrasion-resistant gloves, rubber boots, safety goggles and respiratory protection. Face visors are particularly effective against splashes. Most hardware stores carry these items.

Persons with low resistance to infection (immune-compromised) should never do this type of clean up.

## What are some other considerations?

Before entering the affected area check for safety hazards and consult with your municipal utility, electrician, or gas fitter.

Contact your insurance company to find out whether or not you have coverage for this type of event. A restoration or cleaning services may be suitable. Check for 'restoration companies' or 'cleaning sewer backups' when searching the internet or Yellow Pages.

## How do I clean up?

Cleaning, disinfecting and drying out affected areas quickly is necessary to prevent growth of disease causing-organisms and molds that can remain after a sewage overflow.

- **Remove** moisture and debris from all surfaces and dry materials within 24-48 hours, or as soon as possible, ensuring that none has been trapped in cavities of the wall, floor, or other affected areas.
- **Discard** items that were contaminated by the sewer back-up: insulation, drywall, wall board or paneling, mattresses and pillows, foam rubber, carpets and underlay, books, cardboard and paper products, cosmetics, stuffed animals and toys, upholstered furniture, opened food and non-commercially prepared-canned foods. **Salvage** commercially-canned foods by removing labels, and washing and disinfecting the cans/jars. Disinfect by dipping the cans/jars in a bleach-water mixture (see chart below).
- **Reduce humidity** by opening doors and windows and using fans and dehumidifiers. Furnace blowers or air conditioners should only be used if the air ducts were not impacted and the equipment was not contaminated.
- **Clean** with water and soap (dishwashing or laundry) before disinfection to reduce the risk of disease.
- **Dry** and then **disinfect** cleaned surfaces by spraying or wiping down with a disinfectant solution as noted in the table below.

Household Chlorine liquid Bleach (5.25%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wood and other materials: 1 tablespoon (15 mL) of bleach to 1 quart (1 litre) of water.</li><li>• Concrete surfaces: 1/2 cup (125 mL) of bleach to 1 gallon (4.5 litres) of water.</li></ul>
<b>Caution: do not mix bleach with other household chemical products as this can create a poisonous gas. Do not use full strength bleach as it can cause skin and respiratory problems.</b>	

## Is there anything else I should know?

Keep children and pets out of the sewage-backup area. See a doctor if you think that you or a family member is becoming ill. More emergency information is available at

<https://www.interiorhealth.ca/health-and-wellness/natural-disasters-and-emergencies>