

## **Flood Recovery**

### **Recorded Information Line – April 21, 2005**

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Water damage in your home caused by floods can create serious health and safety concerns. After a flood, you must take precautions to protect your family from developing illness associated with contaminated water, food, and air and moisture problems.

Homeowners who are cleaning up after flooding should not use any drinking sources until health officials approve them; discard frozen foods that may have thawed during a power outage; and begin as soon as possible to dry out and disinfect walls. Standing water and excessive moisture can lead to the growth of bacteria, mold and insects.

Floodwater may contain sewage. Follow these steps to protect yourself and your family from illness:

#### **Cleanup**

Keep children and pets out of the affected area until cleanup has been completed:

- Wear rubber boots, rubber gloves, and goggles during cleanup of affected area.
- Thoroughly clean all hard surfaces (such as flooring, concrete, molding, wood and metal furniture, countertops, appliances, sinks, and other plumbing fixtures) with hot water and laundry or dish detergent, then disinfect with a solution of 1 cup of household bleach to 5 gallons of water. (Note: this solution should not be used for drinking, cooking, or personal hygiene.)
- For items that cannot be washed or dry-cleaned, such as mattresses and upholstered furniture, air dry them in the sun and then spray them thoroughly with a disinfectant. Steam clean all carpeting.
- Remove and discard contaminated household materials that cannot be disinfected, such as wall coverings, clothes, rugs, and drywall.
- Help the drying process by using fans, air conditioning units, and dehumidifiers.
- After completing the cleanup, wash your hands with soap and water.
- If your water supply has been contaminated, use water that has been boiled for 1 minute (allow the water to cool before washing your hands).
  - Or you may use water that has been disinfected for personal hygiene use (solution of 1/8 teaspoon of household bleach per 1 gallon of water). Let it stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy, use solution of 1/4 teaspoon of household bleach per 1 gallon of water.
- Wash all clothes worn during the cleanup in hot water and detergent. These clothes should be washed separately from uncontaminated clothes and linens. It is recommended that a Laundromat be used for washing large quantities of clothes and linens until your onsite wastewater system has been professionally inspected and serviced. Seek immediate medical attention if you become injured or ill.

## **Mold and Mildew**

The most important step you can take to get rid of mold and mildew is to eliminate the source of water and then dry any wet materials. Use ventilation fans and dehumidifiers in bathrooms and kitchens to help dry out your home.

Some people are sensitive to molds. For these people, exposure to molds can cause symptoms such as nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, or wheezing. Some people, such as those with serious allergies to molds, may have more severe reactions, such as fever and shortness of breath.

For questions about mold check the Health Department Web page *Mold and Human Health*: <http://www.gobroomecounty.com/safety> and follow the links.

## **How to Avoid Illness**

It is critical for you to remember to practice basic hygiene during the emergency period. Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been approved for use by health officials or that has been boiled or disinfected:

- before preparing or eating food;
- after toilet use;
- after participating in flood cleanup activities; and
- after handling articles contaminated with floodwater or sewage.

Floodwaters may contain fecal material from overflowing sewage systems, and agricultural and industrial byproducts. Although skin contact with floodwater does not, by itself, pose a serious health risk, there is some risk of disease from eating or drinking anything contaminated with floodwater.

If you have any open cuts or sores that will be exposed to flood water, keep them as clean as possible by washing well with soap to control infection. If a wound develops redness, swelling, or drainage, seek immediate medical attention. If you receive a puncture wound or a wound contaminated with feces, soil, or saliva, contact your medical provider to determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary.

In addition, parents need to help children avoid waterborne illness. Do not allow children to play in flood water areas, wash children's hands frequently (always before meals), and do not allow children to play with flood-water contaminated toys that have not been disinfected. You can disinfect toys using a solution of one cup of bleach in 5 gallons of water.

For more information on recovering from a flood, call the Broome County Health Department at 778-3921 or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web Site [www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/index.asp](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/index.asp)