

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Returning to Your Home After a Flood



Burlington County Health Department

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Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.
Burlington County Health Department
Health Starts Here

All flood water should be considered contaminated. Below are some guidelines you should follow upon returning to your home and during the clean-up.

1. Protect Yourself and Your Family

- Wash hands and face often with soap and drinking quality water after contact with floodwater.
- Avoid touching your eyes, mouth, ears or nose with dirty hands.
- Do not allow children to play in flood waters, or with toys contaminated by floodwater until they are properly disinfected.
- Wash all cuts, abrasions, lacerations and puncture wounds immediately with soap and drinking quality water. Have all deep cuts treated by a medical professional.
- If you are injured or involved in the flood clean up and are not up to date on your tetanus shot than you may need to receive a tetanus shot (Any tetanus shot that was received more than 5 years ago is assumed to be ineffective.)

More information is available at The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/floodsafety.html>

2. Water Quality

Water from a well that has been submerged in flood water should be assumed to be contaminated. (If you have public water, contact your local water supplier to ensure that the water is safe to use).. The following guidelines should be used until you are certain your water is safe to use:

- Do not use the well water for drinking, cooking, making ice, brushing teeth, or even personal washing until you are satisfied that the water is not contaminated.
- Use bottled water. If you use well water, it should be brought to a full ROLLING boil for at least 5 minutes.
- If your well water smells like fuel or has a chemical odor, boiling the water will **not** make it safe to use.
- Once the water has receded, the well will need to be disinfected by a certified well driller.
- Once the well has been treated it will need to be tested to ensure that it is safe to drink.

More information is available at The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/drinking/private-drinking-wells.html>

3. Food Safety

- To be safe, remember, "When in doubt, throw it out."
- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water.
- Discard any food without a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water.
- Food containers with screw-caps, snap-lids, crimped caps (soda pop bottles), twist caps, flip tops, and home canned foods should be discarded if they have come into contact with flood water because they cannot be disinfected.
- Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if you remove can labels, thoroughly wash cans with soap and hot water, rinse cans with water that is safe for drinking, and sanitize cans with a solution consisting of one cup of bleach in 5 gallons of water for 15 minutes or submerge in pot of water, bring to a boil, and continue boiling for 2 minutes. Relabel your cans, including expiration date, with a marker. Use food in reconditioned cans as soon as possible.
- Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples, and pacifiers. There is no way to safely clean them if they have come in contact with contaminated flood waters.
- Clean and sanitize food-contact surfaces (such as metal pans, ceramic dishes, and utensils) by washing with soap and hot, clean water, rinse with clean water, sanitize by immersing them for 1 minute in a solution of 1 cup of unscented chlorine bleach in 5 gallons of clean water, and allow to air dry.

More information may be obtained from:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater/facts.html>

4. Hazardous and Solid (Household) Waste

- All hazardous floating materials, such as oil spills, oil tanks or chemicals should be removed by a professional. Please call the Department of Environmental Protection at 1-877-WARNDEP (1-877-927-6337) to report any spills.
- If your oil heating tank is leaking, filled with water or your basement is filled with heating oil/contaminated water, during business hours, call the Health Department at (609) 265-5515, after hours call (609) 267-8300.
- For all other household waste and hazardous waste check with your municipality on when and where collections are to occur.

More information may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater/facts.html>

5. Dry Out Your Home To Prevent Mold

- Flooded homes should be thoroughly dried out, a process that may take several days or weeks. If weather allows, open windows and doors to aid in the drying-out process.
- Wet carpet and padding should be removed and discarded. Flooring underneath should be cleaned with a bleach and water solution and allowed time to dry.
- Porous materials -- those that absorb water -- such as Sheetrock, some paneling, fiberglass insulation, cellulose insulation, mattresses, pillows, wallpaper and upholstered furniture should be discarded.
- Sheetrock and other porous wallboards should be removed to at least 12 inches above the water line. Check for wicking, the upward movement of moisture to higher levels.

- Clean wall studs where wallboard has been removed and allow them to dry completely.
- Floors, concrete or brick walls, countertops, plastic, glass and other non-porous materials should be washed with soap and water and then with a solution of one to two cups of bleach to a gallon of water and allowed to completely dry.
- Wear rubber gloves and eye protection when using bleach and make sure area is well-ventilated. Don't mix bleach and ammonia. Consider using an N-95 rated dust mask if heavy concentrations of mold are already growing.
- Materials that cannot be effectively cleaned and dried should be placed in sealed plastic bags to prevent the spread of mold spores.
- People allergic to mold and people with asthma or other respiratory conditions should not do mold cleanup.

More information may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater/facts.html>

6. Recreational Lakes and Flood Water

The following guidelines should be followed regarding swimming and recreational use of lakes and streams:

- Do not swim in flood waters. The water should be considered contaminated. It is also very dangerous to swim in flood water that often has a swift current and where debris may be floating in the water.
- Recreation lakes, ponds, rivers and swimming pools where flooding has occurred should not be used until these sites can be tested for any contamination.
- Pets should not be allowed to swim in flood water.

For more information regarding recreational swimming and flood water you may contact the Burlington County Health Department at 609-265-5548.

7. Structural Damage

Unless qualified personnel state otherwise, **the following are signs of unsafe structural conditions:**

- buildings moved off of or shifted on their foundations;
- washed out soil around foundations;
- large cracks or gaps in foundations or basement walls that didn't exist before the flood;
- missing floor joist, main beam, or porch roof supports;
- sagging roofs, floors or ceilings;
- floors that bounce or give when walked on;
- walls that move when pushed;
- gaps between steps and porches;
- leaning walls;
- loose ceiling or wall materials;
- doors or windows stuck for reasons other than swelling due to water or whose frame is racked;
- or other changes in the shape or structure of the building.
- For buildings with chimneys, fireplaces, or other interior brick or stone structures, consider unusual gaps, cracks, loose materials, sags, misalignments or leaning in the structure to be signs of weak structure.

If your basement is filled with just water, no oil or chemicals, you must contract for pump out privately. Check the yellow pages under "Fire & Water Damage Restoration."

8. Other

▪ Outdoor Items

- Clean the surfaces that have been in contact with flood waters.
- Spray the surfaces with water and then soak in sanitizing solution for at least 2 minutes.
- Remember to disinfect items such as children's toys, play equipment and outdoor furniture. Cushions should be discarded.

More information on how to sanitize and disinfect items may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/cleaning-sanitizing/household-cleaning-sanitizing.html>

9. Additional Resources

- Burlington County Health Department
<http://www.co.burlington.nj.us/290/Health-Department>
- American Red Cross – “Repairing Your Flooded Home”
<https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/types-of-emergencies/flood.html>