How to Avoid Getting Sick from Floodwaters

What if there is sewage contamination in or around the home after flood waters recede?

- Sewage (human or animal solid waste) contains bacteria and viruses that could cause illness. To clean an area contaminated with sewage, wear rubber boots, rubber gloves and goggles. Wear long-sleeve shirts and long pants.
- If debris contaminated with sewage has dried out, you may need to wear a special dust mask (look for one labeled N95 at the hardware store) while cleaning to reduce exposure to airborne dust. N95 dust masks do not need any special fitting. A tight-fitting cloth mask is not a substitute for an N95 mask.
- Discard any items that are damaged by contaminated water and cannot be adequately cleaned and disinfected (such as, mattresses, carpeting, carpet padding, rugs, upholstered furniture, cosmetics, stuffed animals, baby toys, pillows, foam-rubber items, books, wall coverings, and most paper products).
- Remove and discard drywall and insulation that has been contaminated with sewage or flood waters.
- Be sure to wash your hands frequently with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected.
- Wash clothes contaminated with flood or sewage water in hot water and detergent. It is recommended that a laundromat be used for washing large quantities of clothes and linens until your onsite waste-water system has been professionally inspected and serviced. These clothes should be washed separately from uncontaminated clothes and linens.

Also, take these precautions:

- Keep your skin, especially any cuts or sores, as clean as possible by washing with soap and disinfected or boiled water. Apply antibiotic ointment and cover with a sterile bandage to reduce the risk of infection.
- If you have deep cuts and/or puncture wounds and have not had a tetanus vaccination within the past 10 years or are unsure if you have, get a tetanus booster.

SURFACES THAT HAVE BEEN IN CONTACT WITH SEWAGE SHOULD FIRST BE CLEANED AND THEN DISINFECTED WITH A SOLUTION OF ONE CUP UNSCENTED BLEACH TO FIVE GALLONS OF WATER.

How should homes and belongings be cleaned ?

- Porous, water-damaged materials and furnishings that cannot easily be cleaned (for example, in a washing machine) should be discarded.
- Hard, non-porous surfaces can be cleaned with non-abrasive household cleaning products mixed with water. Examples include liquid or powdered kitchen cleaners, or liquid dish or hand soap.
- Do not use ammonia or ammonia products with water that has been disinfected with bleach, as this can create hazardous fumes. Always be careful when using household cleaners or disinfectant products. Read and follow all label directions and warning labels before mixing any products.
- Be sure to thoroughly disinfect all surfaces that come in contact with food and children's play areas. You can disinfect with a solution of three tablespoons of bleach to one gallon of water (one cup to five gallons).

What type of disinfecting solutions or cleaners should I use?

For cleaning surfaces such as wooden furniture, hard flooring, molding, plastic items, etc., household cleaning products such as non-abrasive liquid or powdered kitchen cleaners or liquid dish soap mixed with water are fine. Follow by disinfecting with a solution of one cup of bleach in five gallons of water. Use bleach that does not have added scent, like lemon.

What type of cleaning should be done outside in yards and children's play areas?

If you are cleaning up by raking, shoveling or otherwise kicking up dust and debris, it is best to take these precautions:

- Wear rubber boots, rubber gloves and goggles.
- Wear a dust mask (look for one labeled N95 at the hardware store) to help reduce the potential for inhaling dust and contaminants.
- Use a shovel to remove thick deposits of moist sediment on hard surfaces like driveways and patios. Avoid sweeping dried sediments with a broom or using a leaf blower as this will make sediments airborne, increasing the potential for breathing the dust, getting it into your eyes or spreading it to other surfaces.
- Clean children's play equipment and toys, and outdoor surfaces that people will directly contact (such as lawn chairs and picnic tables), with detergent and clean water. Rinse thoroughly with clean water.
- Sand in sandboxes and soil, mulch, and wood chips around outdoor playground equipment may need to be removed.
- You can also reduce your exposure to pathogens in the soil by:
  - Depositing new soil on top of the affected soil and compacting,
  - Planting new grass,
  - Watering to flush organisms out of the upper soil layers,
  - Covering the affected ground with asphalt, brick, stone, cement, or other solid paving material

How should sludge removed from yards be stored and disposed of?

The appropriate source for guidance on sludge handling and disposal is NYS DEC Division of Materials Management, Bureau of Waste Permitting and Planning. They can be reached at either **518-402-8706 or 518-402-8678.**

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