

Advisories for health and safety in recovery

Working in flooded areas

If you're working in a flooded area, avoid sewage, debris, and remains of animals. When working in flooded areas, wear protective equipment such as gloves and boots to avoid direct contact with contaminated water. Always use good hand washing practices during this time. It is especially important to wash your hands with soap or sanitizer before eating or drinking.

Sewage

Flooding may cause wastewater to back up into homes. If sewage has backed up into your home, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Walls, floors, closets, shelves and their contents and any other flooded parts of your home should be thoroughly washed and disinfected. As a general rule, anything you can't wash, disinfect and air dry should be thrown away.

Diarrheal illnesses

If you swallow water that is contaminated with flood water or from any other contaminated source, you might develop a gastrointestinal disorder (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, etc.) from viruses, bacteria, or other microorganisms (germs) that may be in the water.

You can also become ill from germs on your hands or in contaminated food. Some germs can cause illness when only a few of them are swallowed. To protect yourself and your family, make sure your drinking water is safe. Don't eat spoiled or contaminated food. Practice good personal hygiene. Wash your hands carefully with soap and water after using the bathroom and before eating; make sure that other family members do so also. If you do not have clean water to wash your hands, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

If you get diarrhea, drink plenty of liquids – especially water – so that you don't become dehydrated. If you or anyone in your family or your family members – particularly small children and the elderly – have moderate to severe diarrhea (more than 4 or 5 watery stools per day), any bloody diarrhea, a fever over 100 degrees, or a diarrhea that lasts longer than three days, see a doctor.

Tetanus shots

Anyone involved in hurricane clean-up activities should make sure that their tetanus vaccinations are up to date. Tetanus is a risk when you get a puncture wound or cut, because tetanus bacteria in soil can enter the body through the wound or cut. If you received the standard childhood immunizations, and have received a tetanus booster shot within ten years, you will not need a tetanus vaccination unless a healthcare provider determines it is necessary. If you receive a puncture wound and it becomes contaminated with sewage, dirt or flood water, thoroughly clean the wound and have a healthcare provider determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary. Specific recommendations for vaccinations will be made on a case-by-case basis by your health care provider.

Generator Safety

When using a portable generator, follow these safety precautions:

- Only connect the generator to appliances. Never plug a generator into any power outlet in your home. Connecting a portable electric generator directly to your household wiring can be deadly to you and to others.
- Use properly sized polarized extension cords. Overloading an extension cord may cause a fire.
- Never use a generator inside. Keep it generator outdoors, secured with a lock and chain if you feel that's necessary.
- Only use generators outside in well-ventilated areas.
- Keep generators away from doors, windows, vents or air conditioning equipment that could allow deadly fumes to come indoors.
- Be sure the generator is properly grounded. Always locate your generator outside on a dry surface.
- Before refueling, let the engine cool for at least two minutes first. Turn off all appliances connected to the generator before refueling.
- Always follow the instructions that come with your generator.

Chemical Hazards

Be aware of potential hazards you may encounter when returning to your home. Floodwaters and high winds may have moved or buried containers of solvents or other industrial chemicals. If any propane tanks are discovered, do not move them. They present a danger of fire or explosion. Car batteries, even when flooded, may still contain an electrical charge

and should be removed with extreme caution by wearing insulated gloves. Avoid coming into contact with any acid that may have spilled from a damaged car battery.

Animals

Avoid contact with wild animals such as raccoons, squirrels, etc. that may have been displaced by the storm. If you are bitten by any animal, get medical treatment. Dead animals may be found after a flood. The presence of these animals may result in excessive odor or contamination and can attract flies. Small dead animals found around the home may be put in garbage bags and placed in dumpsters, or buried three feet in the ground. Always wear gloves when handling dead animals.

Rats

Following floods, rats and other rodents may move into buildings to escape floodwaters. Rats can carry disease and parasites. Because of the danger of rat infestation, use caution when entering flooded buildings:

- Inspect likely hiding places for rats.
- Check closets, drawers, mattresses, appliances, furniture, stacks of clothes or paper, attics and basements.
- Do not approach rats. They may be aggressive.
- To get rid of rats, use commercially prepared poisons in bait stations with lock-down lids to protect children and pets. Carefully follow the label instructions for their proper use.

Snakes

To escape floods, snakes may enter homes, vehicles or furniture. When beginning clean-up operations, use rakes, pry bars or long-handled tools when removing debris; never expose your hands or feet to places a snake may be hiding. If you see a snake, remain still. Sudden movements may cause the snake to strike. If the snake doesn't move away from you after a few minutes, slowly back away from it. Trying to kill a snake may cause you to be bitten. If you are bitten by a poisonous snake, call 9-1-1 and seek medical assistance immediately.

Drinking Water

If your public water supply has lost power or your private well has been flooded, then water you use for drinking, cooking, making ice, brushing teeth and bathing should be boiled vigorously for at least one minute. Pregnant women should use bottled water and should be used for preparing infant formula. If you cannot boil your water, you can disinfect it with eight (8) drops (1/8 teaspoon; about the size of a nickel) of unscented household bleach per gallon of water. Let it stand for 30 minutes. Water should have a slight bleach odor. Continue with these precautions until notified by authorities that their water is safe to drink.

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