



Arkansas Department of Health

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Cleaning Up After Flood and Sewer Overflows

Floodwaters and sewer overflows can contain bacteria, fecal material, viruses, and other organisms that may cause disease. Follow the information presented below to protect your health and prevent disease.

These basic precautions can help to prevent disease:

- Avoid skin contact with sewer water, especially cuts and sores. Keep them clean and covered.
- Do not allow children to play in areas contaminated by sewage backup.
- Do not eat or drink anything exposed to sewer water.
- Keep contaminated objects, water, and hands away from mucous membranes (mouth, eyes, and nose).
- Wash hands frequently, especially after bathroom use, before eating and immediately following contact with sewer water or contaminated objects or surfaces.

Before you begin removal and cleanup of sewer or floodwater, it is important to take the following precautions to prevent injury:

- Turn off main power switches if necessary. Air out and wipe dry all appliances and electrical outlets exposed to water before use.
- If you have fuel oil or gas systems, be sure tanks are secure and all lines are free from breaks.
- Wear rubber boots, gloves, and an N-95 respirator mask, found at most hardware stores, during removal and cleanup.
- Open windows if possible, to ventilate and dry the area. Fans can be used to help with drying.
- Keep children from playing in water.

The following cleaning guidelines may help prevent the transmission of disease and reduce property loss:

- **General Cleaning**

Discard any contaminated objects that cannot be thoroughly washed or laundered.

Wash contaminated surfaces and objects with warm, soapy water and disinfect with a bleach and water solution made of one-fourth cup of 5.25 percent chlorine bleach per one

gallon of water. For objects that would be damaged by bleach, use a home or laundry disinfectant.

Make sure to read and follow label instructions. Do not use ammonia. Ammonia vapors mixed with bleach vapors create a toxic gas that could be deadly.

- **Specific Cleaning**

Carpets and Rugs

If the damaged area is small, you may be able to save the carpet by cleaning the area with a mild detergent. There also are professional home cleaning services that may be able to clean your carpets. Carpets and rugs with severe water damage must be removed for cleaning or replaced.

Floors, Drapes, and Furniture

Scrub and wash all objects in the affected area of your home, including clothes, exposed to flood waters. Use warm, not hot, tap water with soap. Floors and hard surfaces should be cleaned with a bleach and water solution made of one-fourth cup of 5.25 percent chlorine bleach per one gallon of water or use a household disinfectant. A professional cleaner may be able to clean furniture and drapes.

Basement

Pump out standing water and remove all debris. Wait to pump until floodwaters have receded below basement level. Allow debris to drain before disposal. Strain away all liquids from trash. After straining trash, wrap in newspaper and store in tight-lid garbage cans until pick up. Paneling and wallboard must be immediately cleaned and dried thoroughly. If the damage is severe, they should be removed and replaced.

Food and Water Safety

Use only bottled or disinfected water for drinking, cooking, tooth brushing and bathing until you are sure the water supply is safe. Discard food exposed to contaminated waters. If refrigerators or freezers have taken in water, discard food stored there. If no water entered these appliances, but power was lost long enough for foods to thaw, discard all partially thawed foods unless prepared immediately. Discard milk, cheeses, and other foods prone to spoilage. Completely thawed meats and vegetables should be discarded without question. Discard all bulging or leaking canned food and any food stored in jars. Non-dented, intact cans can be cleaned with a bleach solution before use.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

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