



Ottawa County Health Department



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

AFTER FLOOD CLEAN UP GUIDELINES

The Ottawa County Health Department is providing guidance to residents affected by recent flooding. Possible disease causing contaminants may be present in flood waters causing wells to become contaminated. Contact with flood waters may also be a health hazard.

Persons in contact with flood water should wash hands with soap and disinfected or boiled water before preparing or eating food; after toilet use; after participating in flood cleanup activities and after handling articles contaminated with flood water or sewage.

TIPS FOR BEGINNING FLOOD CLEAN UP

If your community has been flooded, it is time to begin the cleanup process while assessing the property as well as any flood damage. The following information may act as guidance on where to begin the process of flood cleanup.

1) **FIRST STEP: Call your Insurance Agent**

If your home has suffered damage, call the agent who handles your flood insurance to file a claim. If you are unable to stay in your home, make sure to say where you can be reached.

2) **Take Photos of Damage**

To make filing your claim easier, take photos of any water in the house and save the damaged personal property. If necessary, place these items outside the home. An insurance adjuster will need to see what's been damaged in order to process your claim.

3) **Structural Damage**

Check for structural damage before re-entering your home. DO NOT go in if there is a chance of the building collapsing.

4) **Gas**

Upon re-entering your property, do not use matches, cigarette lighters or other open flames since gas may be trapped inside. If you smell gas or hear hissing, open a window, leave quickly, and call the gas company from a neighbor's home.

5) **Electricity**

Keep power off until an electrician has inspected your system for safety.

6) **Plumbing**

Check for sewage and water line damage. If you suspect damage, avoid using the toilets and the tap and call a plumber.

7) **Food**

Throw away any food that has come into contact with flood waters. This includes any canned good items.

8) Water Quality

If your well has been effected by flood waters, boil water for drinking and food preparation until water supply has been tested safe.

9) Repair

Make sure to follow local building codes and ordinances when rebuilding. Use flood-resistant materials and techniques to protect your property from future flood damage.

PREVENTING DAMAGE FROM MOLD

Following a flood, conditions in your home may be ripe for an outbreak of mold, one of the most serious sources of damage to your family possessions.

What is Mold?

Mold, a common term for fungus, attacks organic materials such as paper, books, cloth, photographs, and leather. Mold grows from spores, which are everywhere in our environment. Usually these spores are inactive, but they will germinate when the relative humidity exceeds 70 percent. Temperatures above 65 degrees increase the likelihood of mold growth.

What does it look like?

Active mold growth is slimy or fuzzy and is usually green, black, orange or purple. Inactive mold is dry and powdery and may be white. In early stages, the mold may look like a fine web; in full bloom it looks bushy. Mold spores spread easily; they are carried by air currents, pets and people.

What harm can it do?

Active mold "digests" organic materials such as cloth book covers or the cellulose that composes paper. It can also make permanent stains.

Is mold dangerous to humans?

It can be hazardous to people with respiratory problems. Only a few species are toxic, but many can cause allergic reactions or irritate skin. If you handle moldy materials, work outdoors when possible and wear protective clothing; respirator mask with filter, disposable plastic gloves and clothing you can wash in very hot water or discard. If you are concerned about the toxicity of the mold, your local hospital can refer you to a mycologist.

How can I stop mold from spreading?

Work fast. Under the right conditions, mold can spread and grow quickly. Lower the humidity and temperature. Remember that mold cannot grow in low relative humidity and low temperature. Open the windows if outside humidity is lower than inside; otherwise, use air conditioning. Install dehumidifiers and empty them often. Isolate any moldy objects. Seal moldy trash in plastic bags and remove them immediately. Objects you can save should be dried or frozen as soon as possible. Freezing inactivates mold. Keep the area clean. Mold may remain on shelves and in cupboards where valuables were kept. Clean these surfaces with a disinfectant such as Lysol, and then increase air circulation in the room. Use fans only after moldy objects are removed and all display and storage areas are clean.

How can I save moldy possessions?

Air dry them away from other objects. Spread out papers, stand books on end and fan the pages open. Use blotting materials like clean towels or absorbent paper between layers of cloth or paper. Increase air circulation with a fan, but don't aim the fan directly at the objects.

If you can't dry the objects quickly or you have a large quantity, you can freeze books, documents and small textiles until conditions are right to dry them. Do not freeze moldy photographs. Although ultraviolet light can be damaging, brief exposure to sunlight can stop mold growth and aid drying. Exposure should not exceed 30 minutes. Clean the mold only after it is dry and inactive. Very gently wipe or brush away the mold residue. Work outdoors if possible and always wear protective clothing and a respirator. Avoid harsh cleaning products and bleach; they can ruin objects. Never vacuum fragile items. Use a household vacuum cleaner outdoors, since the exhaust will spread mold spores. Be sure display and storage areas are free of mold before you return any clean object to its proper place. Reinspect the objects from time to time for any new mold growth.

Valuable artifacts and photographs should be handled by a professional conservator. If you would like a free referral for a conservator, you may contact the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, 1717 K Street, NW, Ste. 301, Washington, DC 20036 (202) 452-9328.

PRECAUTIONS AND SAFETY TIPS

Your home has been flooded. Although flood waters may be down in some areas, many dangers still exist. Here are some things to remember in the days ahead.

- Roads may still be closed because they have been damaged or are covered by water. Barricades have been placed for your protection. If you come upon a barricade or a flooded road, go another way.
- Keep listening to the radio for news about what to do, where to go, or places to avoid.
- Do not allow children to play in flood areas
- Wear rubber boots, rubber gloves, and goggles during cleanup of affected area
- If you must walk or drive in areas that have been flooded beware of the following:
 - Stay on firm ground. Moving water only 6 inches deep can sweep you off your feet. Standing water may be electrically charged from underground or downed power lines.
 - Flooding may have caused familiar places to change. Flood waters often erode roads and walkways. Flood debris may hide animals and broken bottles, and it's also slippery. Avoid walking or driving through it.
 - Play it safe. Additional flooding or flash floods can occur. Listen for local warnings and information. If your car stalls in rapidly rising waters, get out immediately and climb to higher ground.

Staying Healthy

- A flood can cause emotional and physical stress. You need to look after yourself and your family as you focus on cleanup and repair.
- Rest often and eat well.
- Keep a manageable schedule. Make a list and do jobs one at a time.
- Discuss your concerns with others and seek help. Contact Red Cross for information on emotional support available in your area.

RESOURCES FOR HELP

American Red Cross
Ottawa County Chapter
270 James St
Holland, MI 49424-1826
Phone: 616-396-6545

- Contact your insurance agent to discuss claims.

- Listen to your radio for information on assistance that may be provided by the state or federal government or other organizations.
- If you hire cleanup or repair contractors, be sure they are qualified to do the job. Be wary of people who drive through neighborhoods offering help in cleaning up or repairing your home. Check references.

OTHER CONCERNS ABOUT FLOOD WATERS

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

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.

QUESTIONS?

Contact the Ottawa County Health Department at (616) 393-5645