

# Cleaning After a Flood

## Returning Home

It is recommended that you only fully reoccupy your home once it has been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected and allowed to dry out. Remember your power supplies may have been affected. Turn off the power and get advice from your supplier(s) before use.

## General Cleaning

It is important to wear rubber boots, rubber gloves, and goggles during clean-up of the affected area.

- Keep children and pets out of the affected area until clean-up has been completed.
- Thoroughly clean all hard surfaces (including walls, appliances, floors, furniture, etc.) with a solution of hot water mixed with an ordinary household cleaning soap.
- Wash all soft fabric items such as linen, clothing, soft furnishings, in a hot wash (or recommended temperature on detergent manufacturer's instructions). Items that cannot be put in a washing machine should be dry-cleaned.
- Throw out items that cannot be washed and disinfected (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.
- After cleaning, allow everything to dry thoroughly, which will also help to destroy any germs left behind. Use fans, air conditioners, heaters and dehumidifiers, if available, to help the drying process but bear in mind the advice below under "heating and ventilation."
- Wash all clothes worn during clean-up activities in hot water and detergent and wash them separately from uncontaminated clothes and linens.

## Heating and Ventilation:

- It is important to ensure your home is properly heated and ventilated to assist the drying process. However, remember that gas or diesel generators, dehumidifiers, pressure washers and patio-type gas heaters should never be used indoors without adequate ventilation. The exhaust gases contain carbon monoxide which can quickly build up to poisonous levels without proper ventilation. Also be aware of the increased fire risk and take extra care when using such items.

## Mould:

- Mould grows on surfaces that are not dried quickly. For most household surfaces, it takes one or two days for mould to start growing. By the time you get back into your house after a flood, mould may have already started growing. The best you can do is clean up. The secret to preventing mould problems is to clean and dry all wet surfaces as quickly as possible—within hours of the flooding.
- Use personal protective equipment such as gloves and respiratory protection (e.g. N-95 disposable respirator) if assessment might disturb mould. Minimize the creation of dust and mould.
- Prior to any mould cleaning and removal, consider the potential presence of other environmental hazards such as asbestos and lead.
- Break out all ceilings and walls that have been soaked or that have absorbed water. Remove materials at least 500 mm (20 in.) above the high-water line. Removing only the lower part of the wall applies if action is taken immediately after the flood. Gypsum board walls that have been exposed to high humidity or standing water for a prolonged period of time should be removed and discarded. Ceiling tiles and panelling should be treated like drywall.
- Non-porous materials (e.g. metals, glass, and hard plastics) can be cleaned with a detergent.
- Semi-porous and porous materials, such as wood and concrete can be cleaned if they are structurally sound.
- Porous materials, such as ceiling tiles, insulation, wallboards (with more than a small area < 10 square feet of mould growth) should be removed and discarded.
- A professional restoration consultant should be contacted to restore valuable items that have been damaged.
- Clean affected area using soap or detergent solution using gentle cleaning method that effectively removes mould to limit the creation of dust.
- Clean surfaces and materials adjacent to areas of mould growth for settled spores with a vacuum equipped with a High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filter.
- Disinfectants are only required when cleaning mould growth resulting from sewage waters.

For large areas (greater than 100 square feet), hire a properly trained and equipped mould remediation professional.

## Chemical Hazards:

Flood waters may have moved or soaked into containers or chemicals, solvents and other industrial items from their normal storage place. In general avoid contact with water and materials which may have been chemically contaminated. If it becomes necessary to handle this material, wear rubber gloves, boots and a disposable apron. Avoid enclosed areas that may be chemically contaminated, such as garages and cellars where hazardous fumes may build up. Ensure such confined areas are adequately ventilated and are not accessible to children and animals.

## Food and Water

Throw out **any** food items that have been in contact with flood water, sewage, chemicals, animal waste, dirt, snow or ice, including:

- Fresh produce, meat, fish, dairy products, and eggs
- Baby formula containers, cardboard juice and milk containers
- Opened or unopened glass /plastic containers with cork, screw tops or pull tops, snap lids (beer, sauces, milk cartons, pop, sauces etc.)
- Dry goods that may have been in flood waters (spices, flour, sugar)
- Home-canned foods
- Canned goods that are dented, leaking, bulging or rusted

Only undamaged, commercially prepared foods that are sealed in unopened, waterproof cans, jars or pouches are entirely safe to use. These products must not have had any contact with flood waters, sewage or chemicals and must be carefully inspected, cleaned and disinfected before use:

- If possible, remove the labels on cans or pouches as they could have come in contact with dirt or bacteria. Re-label the can or pouch, including the "best before" date with a permanent marker
- After the labels are removed, wash cans for two minutes with a mild bleach solution (5 mL/1 tsp of bleach per 750mL/3 cups of hot water)
- Air dry all cleaned food cans, jars and pouches to prevent potential contamination when containers opened

## Refrigerated or Frozen Foods:

If the power has been off, a full freezer will keep food frozen for approximately 48 hours. A half full-freezer will keep food frozen for 24 hours. An unopened refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours.

Throw out any food in the refrigerator or freezer that:

- has come in contact with any flood water, sewage, smoke, fumes, or chemicals
- has been at room temperature for two hours or more, or has an unusual colour or odour. Remember that food contaminated with bacterial does not always smell bad or appear spoiled
- has thawed and been above 4 °C (40 °F) for more than four hours

Food that still contains ice crystals can be refrozen.

**If you own or manage a food establishment,  
contact the Health Unit  
for additional instructions.**

## Water:

- Follow the advice of the Health Unit regarding the safety of the water supply. If there is any possibility the water supply has been affected, you will be advised to boil water before drinking or seek alternative sources.
- If you notice a change in water quality (discolouration or a change in taste or smell) contact the Health Unit.
- Ensure water taps are cleaned and sanitized and run water through them thoroughly before using them for the first time.
- If your water is a private supply (well/cistern), it is important to check that it has not been affected by flood water. If the supply has been covered with flood water, do not drink or bathe in water until all the well disinfection steps have been completed, the well has been thoroughly flushed and returned water sample results have been satisfactory. Additional information on disinfecting a well is available from the Health Unit.

1-866-888-4577



HALIBURTON, KAWARTHA,  
PINE RIDGE DISTRICT  
HEALTH UNIT

[www.hkpr.on.ca](http://www.hkpr.on.ca)

### Brighton

35 Alice Street  
Brighton, ON K0K 1H0  
(613) 475-0933

### Haliburton

191 Highland Street, Unit 301  
Haliburton, ON K0M 1S0  
(705) 457-1391

### Lindsay

108 Angeline Street South  
Lindsay, ON K9V 3L5  
(705) 324-3569

### Port Hope

200 Rose Glen Road  
Port Hope, ON L1A 3V6  
(905) 885-9100