



AFTER THE FLOOD

Precautions When Returning to Your Home

Electrical

- Electrical power and natural gas or propane tanks should be shut off to avoid fire, electrocution, or explosions.
- Try to return to your home during the daytime so that you do not have to use any lights. Use battery-powered flashlights and lanterns, rather than candles, gas lanterns, or torches.
- If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open all windows, and leave the house immediately. Notify the gas company or the police or fire departments, and **do not turn on the lights or do anything that could cause a spark**. Do not return to the house until you are told it is safe to do so.
- Your electrical system may also be damaged. If you see frayed wiring or sparks, or if there is an odor of something burning but no visible fire, you should immediately shut off the electrical system at the circuit breaker.
- Avoid any downed power lines, particularly those in water. Avoid wading in standing water, which also may contain glass or metal fragments.
- You should consult your utility company about using electrical equipment, including power generators. **Be aware that it is against the law and a violation of electrical codes to connect generators to your home's electrical circuits without the approved, automatic-interrupt devices. If a generator is on line when electrical service is restored, it can become a major fire hazard.** In addition, the improper connection of a generator to your home's electrical circuits may endanger line workers helping to restore power in your area.
- All electrical equipment and appliances must be completely dry before returning them to service. It is advisable to have a certified electrician check these items if there is any question.
- Also, remember not to operate any gas-powered equipment indoors.

Septic Systems and Basements

- Do not use the sewage system until water in the disposal field is lower than the water level around the house.
- If you suspect damage to your septic tank, have it professionally inspected and serviced. Signs of damage include settling or inability to accept water. **Most septic tanks are not damaged by a flood since they are below ground and completely covered.** However, sometimes septic tanks or pump chambers become filled with silt and debris, and must be professionally cleaned. If tile lines in the disposal field are filled with silt, a new system may have to be installed in new trenches. Because septic tanks may contain dangerous gases, only trained specialists should clean or repair them.
- Do not pump water out of basements too quickly. Exterior water pressure could collapse the walls.



South Central Public Health District

Prevent. Promote. Protect.

- If flood water backs up in a basement, clean the area and disinfect the floor with a chlorine solution of **1 cup of bleach to five gallons of water**.

Cleanup

- Walls, hard-surfaced floors, and many other household surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water and **disinfected with a solution of 1 cup of bleach to five gallons of water**.
- Be particularly careful to thoroughly disinfect surfaces that may come in contact with food, such as counter tops, pantry shelves, refrigerators, etc. Areas where small children play should also be carefully cleaned.
- Wash all linens and clothing in hot water, or dry clean them. For items that cannot be washed or dry cleaned, such as mattresses and upholstered furniture, air dry them in the sun and then spray them thoroughly with a disinfectant.
- Steam clean all carpeting.
- If there has been a backflow of sewage into the house, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Remove and discard contaminated household materials that cannot be disinfected, such as wall coverings, cloth, rugs, and drywall.

Immunizations

- Outbreaks of communicable diseases after floods are unusual. However, the rates of diseases that were present before a flood may increase because of decreased sanitation or overcrowding among displaced persons. Increases in infectious diseases that were not present in the community before the flood are not usually a problem.
- **If you receive a puncture wound or a wound contaminated with feces, soil, or saliva, have a doctor or health department determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary based on individual records.**
- Specific recommendations for vaccinations should be made on a case-by-case basis, or as determined by the health departments.

Chemical Hazards

- Use extreme caution when returning to your area after a flood. Be aware of potential chemical hazards you may encounter during flood recovery. Flood waters may have buried or moved hazardous chemical containers of solvents or other industrial chemicals from their normal storage places.
- If any propane tanks (whether 20-lb. tanks from a gas grill or household propane tanks) are discovered, do not attempt to move them yourself. These represent a very real danger of fire or explosion, and if any are found, police or fire departments should be contacted immediately.
- Car batteries, even those in flood water, may still contain an electrical charge and should be removed with extreme caution by using insulated gloves. Avoid coming in contact with any acid that may have spilled from a damaged car battery.