

PUBLIC PROTECTION - INFORMATION

Food Safety Advice to Flooded Householders

Cleaning Up and Food Hygiene

If you've been affected by flooding, here's how you can stay healthy, including cleaning your home and dealing with food.

Flooding presents a number of risks and hazards to health, either directly (such as injuries caused by fast-flowing floodwater) or the longer-term impact of dealing with the aftermath. The main health risks associated with flooding are drowning and being injured by an accident in flowing water.

Under no circumstances go into a flooded area. Infections caused by flooding are rare in the UK. See your GP if anyone in your family has symptoms such as sickness, diarrhoea or stomach cramps.

Mental health

Being affected by a flood and cleaning your home afterwards can be physically and mentally stressful. If you feel overwhelmed and need some help to cope, talk to your GP. The Citizens Advice Bureau can help with practical things, like money and alternative housing. Getting involved in community activities and talking to friends, neighbours and family may also help.

Food, water and general hygiene

Maintaining good hygiene reduces health risks. Always wash your hands with soap and clean water:

after you use the toilet

when you handle food

after being in contact with floodwater or items contaminated by floodwater Don't allow children to play in floodwater areas. Wash their hands frequently, especially before meals.

Keep open cuts or sores clean and use waterproof plasters to prevent them being exposed to floodwater.

Food preparation and storage

Don't eat any food, including tinned food, that has come into contact with floodwater.

Wash all food preparation surfaces, plastic and glass chopping boards, crockery, pots, pans and other utensils with hot clean water and detergent, then a normal kitchen disinfectant. Powerful disinfectants such as bleach are unnecessary.

Throw away wooden chopping boards that have been in contact with floodwater.

Wash your hands before and after preparing food.

Make sure that all shelves and surfaces that food will touch are disinfected and undamaged.

To wash food that you will eat raw (for example, salad or fruit), use boiled water that has been cooled.

It's safe to use unboiled tap water for boiling food or for preparing food that is going to be cooked.

Water

If your water comes through a mains supply, follow the advice of the local water company. If your water is a private supply from a well or spring and you notice changes in the way it looks, smells or tastes, ring your local council for advice.

If you're concerned about the purity of your water, boil it before you use it. Continue doing this until the water supply has been shown to be safe.

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Boiling water

Boiling water kills harmful bacteria, viruses and parasites. Bring the water to the boil and allow it to cool before you drink it.

Also remember:

Water from the hot tap is never suitable for drinking.

Water taps must be cleaned and disinfected before use after a flood.

If you're bottle-feeding a baby, use boiled water. Don't use bottled water for your baby unless it's recommended by a doctor or health visitor, as some bottled water is unsuitable for babies.

Cleaning inside your home

You can clean and disinfect your home using normal household products. However, floodwater can contain sewage, chemical hazards and animal waste, so when you're cleaning up:

Wear waterproof gloves, wellington boots and a face mask (available from DIY shops).

Keep children and pets out of the affected area until the clean-up is complete.

Clean walls, hard floors and other surfaces with hot soapy water, using ordinary household detergent such as washing-up liquid, until they look clean.

Remove and throw away soft furnishings, such as curtains, and fittings that are mouldy or damaged beyond repair.

Contaminated soft furnishings that can't go in a washing machine need to be professionally cleaned. If this isn't possible, you may have to throw them away.

Wash clothes and bedding in a hot wash (60C or the hottest on the items' instruction labels).

Clothes worn during the clean-up should be washed separately from other items.

Heating and good ventilation, fans, air conditioning units and dehumidifiers will all help drying.

Petrol- or diesel-powered generators, dehumidifiers and pressure washers should never be used indoors without adequate ventilation as their exhaust gases can build up and kill.

Visit the Health Protection Agency (HPA) website to find out more about what to do after a flood. The HPA also has some useful questions and answers about flood safety.

http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1213686561005

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