

# Health advice -

## How to clean up safely following floods



This leaflet provides important health advice and some basic precautions to keep you and your family safe while cleaning up your flooded home. Further general advice is given in the Environment Agency leaflet *After a Flood*, which can be seen at the website [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

### Starting off

**Put on protective clothing:** rubber boots, an apron and waterproof gloves. A standard face mask, such as those sold in DIY stores, is also a good idea if you are scrubbing, hosing or pressure-washing. Goggles offer added protection and they can be reused after thorough washing. Cover any open cuts with waterproof plasters.

*Easy does it – the stress and strain associated with flooding and cleaning up afterwards can cause additional health problems. Do not overdo it when cleaning up.*

**Take care with electrics and gas:** do not switch on electrical appliances that have been in contact with floodwater unless a competent electrician has checked them, as there is a risk of electrocution.

Even if gas appliances appear to be working normally, the flue or ventilation systems maybe affected. For safety reasons, have appliances inspected by a Gas Safe Register engineer.

**Keep children safe:** keep children and pets out of the affected area until the clean-up has been completed. Damaged timber floorboards and tiles, even when they are dried out, may present a risk of injury to the young.

*Remember to wash your hands thoroughly after each clean-up session and always before eating or preparing food.*

### How and what to clean:

Using clean water, detergent, then a normal kitchen disinfectant, clean and disinfect work surfaces, plates, pans, cutlery, and plastic/glass chopping boards, before preparing food. Powerful disinfectants, such as strong bleach are not necessary and may be harmful to surfaces.

Thoroughly clean all other affected hard surfaces, including walls, hard-surfaced floors and furniture with hot soapy water, using an ordinary household detergent. Allow to dry thoroughly as this will also help to destroy germs left behind.

Do not mix detergents with bleaches as this may release hazardous fumes.

## **Clothing and bedding**

Wash these and other soft fabric articles such as children's toys on a hot cycle (60°C or higher), which will destroy most germs that may be present. Wash all clothes worn cleaning up separately to uncontaminated clothes.

Other contaminated soft furnishings that cannot be put in a washing machine will have to be cleaned professionally. If this is not possible they may have to be discarded.

*Remember to take regular breaks in the fresh air.*

## **Drying out**

Heating and good ventilation will assist the drying process. Leave doors and windows open whenever possible and safe. You can help this process by using fans, air conditioning units and dehumidifiers.

Remember that petrol or diesel generators and other fuel-driven equipment should never be brought indoors. *The exhaust gases contain carbon monoxide, which can quickly build up to poisonous levels without good ventilation.*

*Switch off appliances, move to a well-ventilated area and seek medical advice if you experience dizziness, headaches or disorientation.*

Dangerous fumes may build up in enclosed areas such as garages and cellars. Make sure these places are well ventilated before you go in and do not let children or animals go inside until the areas are safe.

## **Mould**

Mould on damp walls should disappear as your home dries out. Areas where mould remains can be cleaned with warm water and detergent. Arrange specialist treatment for persistent mould. The contractor will use appropriate protective equipment and precautions. You should not attempt to do this yourself.

## **Rats and other pests**

Rats may be on the move after a flood, but they are generally wary of humans. Put rubbish in hard bins, or if this is not possible, try to keep rubbish bags in an appropriate place away from your home. Avoid approaching rats. If you are bitten by a rat then seek medical advice. Dispose of any dead rats in a plastic bag, wearing rubber gloves.

## **Living in your flood-damaged home**

It is recommended that you only fully re-occupy your home once the above cleaning has been carried out. If you decide to return home with further work outstanding:

- Try to have some heating on at all times, once it has been safety checked
- Consider the use of a dehumidifier
- Ensure the property is well ventilated
- Leave windows open as much as possible but be mindful of security.

If you are living in a flood-damaged home and you become concerned that it is no longer safe to stay in, please contact your local council for advice.

For more information visit the following websites:

Health Protection Agency – [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)

Food Standards Agency – [www.foodstandards.gov.uk](http://www.foodstandards.gov.uk)