

***Working for Healthy People and  
Healthy Communities***



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# After a Flood

***How to Protect Your  
Home and Family  
from the Hazards of  
Contaminated Water***



### **Flooding Hazards**

Water is a cherished necessity of life. But when excess water floods homes, businesses or vehicles, the effects can be devastating. Even minor flooding can saturate buildings, damage furniture and ruin personal belongings. Floods can fill your home with more than just water – dangerous contaminants like E. Coli, Salmonella and Shigella are often found in impure floodwaters.

You can protect your home and family from the dangerous effects of floodwater pollutants with a few simple cleaning tips and disinfecting techniques. By following these easy guidelines brought to you by the Atlantic County Division of Public Health, you can minimize the extent and cost of flood damage and ensure your family's safety.

Flooding and water damage can be devastating, but it does not have to destroy your family's health. Look over this important flood clean up information and remember that the Atlantic County Division of Public Health is here for you with information, advice and the ability to help you enjoy healthy living in Atlantic County.

A net bag makes disinfecting small toys a lot easier. Soft, porous toys and other children's items like pacifiers and baby bottles can absorb harmful contaminants. Usually these items should be thrown away. If there is any question about whether an item can be disinfected or not, it is better to throw it away than to risk spreading contamination.

### **Outdoor Items**

Clean exterior surfaces that have been in contact with flood waters with clean water and a powerful hose before soaking in sanitizing solution for at least two minutes. Be sure to rinse with clean water. Remember to disinfect items such as children's toys, play equipment and outdoor furniture.

Cleaning up after flooding or water damage can be a difficult and time-consuming process. It is also an essential task that ensures your safety.

### **Get More Information**

We hope this flood cleanup guide has been helpful to you in preparing for and responding to flooding and water damage.

If you have any questions regarding flooding, household safety or environmental health, call the Atlantic County Division of Public Health at 609-645-5971.

## Clothing and Linens

Because germs and mildew attack most natural and man-made fibers, all fabric items should be disinfected as soon as possible. If your washing machine has been damaged or you have several loads of laundry to wash, be sure that fabrics waiting to be washed are not kept wet. Hang these items on a line or spread them out to dry. Be sure to wear rubber gloves whenever you handle flood-soaked items.

Check the care tags on each item for specific washing instructions. Wash fabrics in the hottest setting recommended on the care tag and be sure to use a disinfectant that is registered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and recommended for laundry. Registration information should be printed on the product label.

If using household liquid bleach, add 1 ½ cups bleach for large capacity washing machines and one cup bleach for standard machines. After washing, dry fabrics using a machine or hang them on a line. Dry-clean-only fabrics, furs and leather goods should be cleaned only by trained professionals.

## Children's Items

Washable toys should be disinfected using sanitizing solution, soaking for at least two minutes before being rinsed with clean water.

## Protect Your Home and Family

It is important to begin cleaning up as soon as possible after flooding or water damage. Harmful germs, mildew and mold thrive in damp conditions, so be sure to target both visible dirt and invisible germs.

Both during and after clean up, make sure you protect yourself from both germs and chemicals by following these simple guidelines:

- Use rubber gloves when handling items that have been in flood waters.
- Wear washable clothing while cleaning up and launder it with hot water and detergent.
- Wash hands with soap and water after being in flooded areas.
- Wear rubber boots while in flooded areas and disinfect them afterward.
- Throw cleaning rags away in plastic bags.

## Mix Your Own Disinfectant

Mixing your own disinfecting solution using household bleach and water is an easy, affordable and practical way to sanitize your home and belongings after water damage.

Liquid bleach is not only an effective disinfectant, it is also safe for the environment and easy to use throughout your home. To mix an effective sanitizing solution,

combine  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of household liquid bleach with one gallon of clean water. Items can either be soaked in this solution or washed using a clean rag. Either way, allow the solution to cover each item for at least two minutes before rinsing it with clean water and then drying it to prevent the growth of mildew. Remember to change this solution as soon as it becomes cloudy.

Although bleach and water can be safely mixed, you should never mix other household chemicals or cleaning products unless the label instructions indicate that it is safe. Some chemical combinations – like ammonia and chlorine bleach – can be deadly, so use care when using any household cleaner.

### Inside Your Home

As soon as flood waters recede, begin disinfecting your home by cleaning hard surfaces like floors, walls and counters with sanitizing solution. If possible, clean and dry large items outside the house to prevent the spread of contamination.

Sometimes flooding causes sewage backup in your home. Disinfect your toilet by letting one cup of liquid household bleach stand in the bowl for 10 minutes.

### Furniture and Appliances

Although solid wood furniture can usually be cleaned and repaired after flood damage, water often warps wood veneer. Upholstered furniture, mattresses and carpets soak up floodwater and contaminants. In most cases, these items should be thrown away or cleaned by a professional.

Household appliances that have been submerged in floodwaters must be clean and dry before use. Talk with an electrician to be sure that your appliances can be used safely.

### Kitchen Safety

Disinfect dishes and other kitchen items by soaking them in sanitizing solution for at least two minutes before rinsing in clean water.

Plastic or porous items such as wooden spoons, cutting boards and baby bottles can absorb contaminants. These items cannot be safely disinfected and should be thrown away.

You should also throw away all food items that have come in contact with floodwaters. Even canned goods can be contaminated, so be sure to discard them.