

FLOOD HAZARDS – PROTECTING YOUR HEALTH

WHAT IS THE RISK?

Floodwaters can carry a wide range of pollutants including micro-organisms ('germs', 'bugs') that can cause disease. Toxic chemicals may also be present. These pollutants originate from the ground surface, septic tanks, sewerage systems and industrial sites. They can contaminate food, furnishings, surfaces and any other articles that come into contact with floodwaters.

All items that have been in contact with floodwater should be treated with caution. Personal hygiene is very important to prevent the spread of communicable disease following flood events.

All flood waters should be considered contaminated. Regularly wash hands with clear water and soap, or hand sanitiser such as alcohol hand gel.

IF YOUR HOUSE HAS BEEN FLOODED:

- **CHECK** with the local council that it is safe to re-enter your home. You should only return back to your house **AFTER** :
 - council building, plumbing and environmental health officers have inspected the premises to ensure the building is safe.
 - The electrical supply authority has checked that the power supply and installation is safe.
 - The gas supply authority has checked that the gas supply is safe.
 - Floodwaters have receded from the property.
- Take care to be safe when first re-entering your home. Not all damage can be seen. Watch out for loose materials that could fall, flooded or damaged electrical wiring, broken or leaking gas lines, etc. Wear sturdy footwear to avoid injury.
- Consult an engineer if there are signs that your home has moved on its foundations, e.g. new cracks in walls, out of shape door frames, etc.
- If possible, use torches or other battery-powered lights instead of candles. Do not smoke or use matches, candles or other open flames in case gas has collected inside.

CLEANING UP AFTER A FLOOD

In all cases approach your insurance company about damaged goods before disposing of them.

- Where possible take photos of the damage before clean-up.
- Wear protective clothing, goggles, gloves and rubber footwear when cleaning up.
- Keep children and pets away.
- Open all the windows and doors to ventilate the house and assist drying. Dehumidifiers and fans can assist. Do not use heaters more than necessary as too much heat can warp and crack wood.
- Drain away any water lying under the building. It may be necessary to dig a pit and pump out the water that collects. Increase the airflow under the house by removing ventilation grills, foundation linings. Leaving access doors open and cutting back plants that are obstructing vents.
- Take everything out of the house that can be moved – floor coverings, furniture, moveable appliances, storage items, clothing, etc.
- Discard contaminated carpets, rugs, curtains and upholstered furniture unless they can be cleaned thoroughly and disinfected. Appliances such as fridges and freezers and electrical goods that have been in contact with floodwaters should be discarded. Place discarded items in a secure area such as a shed or garage until they can be checked by your insurance assessor and a claim lodged.
- Wall cavities, cavities behind kickboards and other structural voids (e.g. under baths) that have been subject to water inundation should be drained, cleaned and allowed to dry. This may require the removal of interior wall finishing materials and insulation. Your local council will provide advice on this.
- Replacement of interior linings, insulation and flooring can only occur once the sub-structure has dried; council staff will be able to advise you on this. Failure to thoroughly dry out your home may result in the growth of mould which may pose a health risk for you and your family.
- The integrity of laminated surfaces (e.g. benches and cabinetry) and manufactured timber products, e.g. particle boards, MDF, needs to be checked. Water can permeate the timber causing swelling, buckling and lifting of surfaces and making the material impossible to disinfect and keep clean.

See over...

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CLEANING UP AFTER A FLOOD CONTINUED:

- Wash or flush down walls, shelves, cabinetry and floors with clean water and sweep or scrape to remove contaminated water and sediment. Use hot, soapy water if possible. Rinse and then disinfect. Use a disinfectant that is appropriate for the surface or article. Chlorine (bleach) solution is a very effective disinfectant but can discolour or damage some materials (e.g. removing colour from fabrics and darkening metallic items). Read labels on the available disinfectants for amounts to use and method of application. Be careful about mixing household cleaners and disinfectants – check labels for advice. Keep windows and doors open during disinfection and wear protective clothing. Leave surfaces wet for at least 20 minutes, then rinse with clean water. Allow to air-dry.
- Thoroughly wash cooking, eating, and other kitchen containers and utensils in hot, soapy water if they have been covered by floodwaters. Rinse thoroughly in safe water, then disinfect by immersing for 1 minute in a solution of 2 cups of household bleach in 10 litres of water. Rinse again in safe water. Alternatively, boil all dishes/utensils for one minute and let cool.
- Flood damaged clothing and textiles should be cleaned as soon as possible to prevent mould growth. Machine wash items using detergent and a disinfectant at levels recommended for heavily soiled clothing. If safe for fibres and dyes of fabric, use chlorine bleach (1 cup in top-loading washer and ½ cup in front-loaders). Use highest water level possible, don't overload the washer and use the hottest water temperature suitable for the garments. Dry in a dryer (at hottest temperature suitable for the fabric) or dry outside in the sun.
- If mould has developed on surfaces, furnishings, etc. extra care must be taken during clean-up to reduce exposure to mould spores. Use protective clothing and a particulate respirator suitable for filtering out spores. Use soap and water to clean the surface then apply a commercial mould product or household bleach solution (refer to manufacturers instructions on container).

PERSONAL HYGIENE AND SAFETY

- **ALWAYS** wash your hands after you touch any surfaces or objects contaminated with floodwater and before you eat or drink anything or touch your hands to your face. Use soap and safe water (that has been boiled or disinfected). Dry your hands thoroughly after washing. If safe water is not available, you can use alcohol-based hand sanitisers.
- If you have an open cut or sore that has been exposed to floodwaters, keep it as clean as possible by washing with soap and safe water and covering with a waterproof dressing. Contact a doctor for further treatment advice. If redness, swelling or discharge occurs, seek immediate medical attention.
- **AVOID** wading or playing in floodwaters as there is a risk of drowning and potential skin infections through open wounds coming into contact with contaminated waters.
- **DO NOT** eat any food that may have come into contact with floodwater.
- **DO NOT** drink any water unless you know it is safe (bottled, boiled or disinfected).
- **DO NOT** gather or eat kai moana (shellfish) after a flood event until you have been told by Public Health officials that it is safe to do so.

**KEEP LISTENING TO YOUR RADIO FOR INSTRUCTIONS,
INFORMATION AND ADVICE**

Contact your local Council for further information

