

IMPORTANT HEALTH INFORMATION FOR DEALING WITH FLOODING IN YOUR HOME

ASSINIBOINE REGIONAL HEALTH AUTHORITY FLOOD WATER CLEAN-UP INFORMATION PACKAGE

CONTACTS FOR INFORMATION AND SUPPORT:

Government of Manitoba website with extensive flood clean-up information:
<http://www.gov.mb.ca/flooding/factsheets.html>

Assiniboine RHA Public Health: 1-877-509-7852

Manitoba Environmental Health Branch: 204-726-6601

Assiniboine RHA Mental Health Services: 204-571-2952 Monday to Friday

24 Hour Crisis Line for Adults & Mobile Crisis Unit : 888-379-7699

24 Hour Crisis Line for Children / Youth Issues: 866-403-5459

Health Links: 24 hours: 888-315-9275

Farm & Rural Stress Line: 866-367-3276 (10:00 am to 9:00 pm weekdays)

24 Hour Crisis Line: Klinik Community Health Centre: 888-322-3019

24 Hour Line: Manitoba Suicide Line 877-435-7170

What health measures are needed when cleaning my home after a flood?

When You First Return Home after a Flood

- Return during daylight hours when it's easier to see problems and hazards.
- If the power was left on when you evacuated, do NOT enter the house until it has been inspected by an electrician.
- If you see a downed power line or smell gas, don't touch anything. Leave the area immediately and call Manitoba Hydro or toll free 1-888-624-9376 (1-888-MB HYDRO).
- Before going into a flooded building, check to be sure the foundation, roof and other supports are safe. If you must force a door open, stand outside the doorway in case the ceiling gives way.
- Watch for buckled walls or floors or holes in floors or ceilings, etc.
- Avoid dangerous debris, such as broken glass and loose wiring.
- Don't touch the electrical panel or use any appliances, pressure or heating systems until an electrician can make sure they are safe. Authorities will let you know when power can be restored to your home.
- Use a flashlight (not an open flame) to check for damage inside.
- Household items damaged in the flood must be discarded according to local regulations.
- Your drinking water, sewage or septic system may be damaged. Check with your municipality if you have a municipal drinking water or sewage system.

Cleaning Needs

- rubber gloves, boots, protective eyewear or goggles
- shovels to clean up sludge and other debris
- pails, mops, sponges, rags
- plastic garbage bags
- big containers for wet clothes and washable bedding and a clotheslines to dry them
- unscented detergent and household cleaners (scented products may cause allergies or cling to food containers or other food preparation surfaces)
- a disinfectant, such as bleach, for items such as cooking utensils, food containers and toys.
- If your well was overtopped by floodwater, it may not be operational and an alternate water source may be required for cleaning purposes.

Other Clean-Up Equipment

- You may need extension cords, submersible pumps, wet/dry shop vacuums, carbon monoxide detectors, dehumidifiers, fans or heaters.
- Some generators and clean-up equipment can be rented, so check before you buy.
- If you're using gas-powered pumps, generators, pressure washers, etc., don't put them in enclosed areas and make sure you use a carbon monoxide detector, even in semi-closed areas.
- When using electrical equipment, ALWAYS keep the cords out of the water.
- If you're operating electrical equipment in wet areas, wear rubber boots.

Hygiene/Safety

- Avoid direct contact with contaminated water and surfaces – wear rubber gloves and boots.
- When working in cold standing water, wear insulated clothing and rubber boots, take frequent breaks to warm up and change into dry clothing as often as possible.
- Don't rub eyes, mouth, ears or nose with contaminated rubber gloves.

- Don't expose open sores or cuts to contaminated water or surfaces.
- Wash all exposed skin often with soap and water and bath or shower with soap and water at the end of the clean-up day.
- Change cleaning clothes daily and wash contaminated clothes separately.
- Thoroughly clean surfaces used for food (counter tops, storage shelves, etc.) and areas where children play.
- Ensure the area you are working in is adequately ventilated.

Clean Up

- Get your house back in order as soon as possible, to protect your health and prevent further damage.
- Pace the clean-up activities and take frequent breaks.
- Think of clean up in stages:
 - Remove the water.
 - Remove dirt and debris (ex: sludge left over from floodwater).
 - Throw out items that can't be cleaned.
 - Thoroughly dry out the building and its contents.
 - Keep children away from contaminated areas during clean up.
 - Avoid contact with floodwater or anything that may have gotten wet, unless you're wearing protective gear.
 - Consult Manitoba Hydro or an electrician about using electrical equipment for drying, lighting or heating, including power generators – they could be fire hazards if they've been exposed to floodwater.
 - Remove all wet, dirty materials and debris from the building and put them in a large disposable container outside the house.

NOTE: Bleach can be used for some clean-up jobs. It should be handled with caution, using gloves and eye protection to avoid chemical burns.

DO NOT use bleach at the same time as other cleaners because the combination may cause toxic fumes.

Removing Water

- Drain floodwater from your home in stages – about one-third of it daily. If the ground is still saturated and the water is removed too quickly, walls or floors could give way.
- Use pumps or pails to remove standing water, then a wet/dry shop vacuum to soak up the rest.

Heating and Appliances

- Have an inspector, electrician or local authorities inspect your heating/air conditioning system and ducts to ensure they are safe to use.
- Flooded forced-air heating ducts and return ducts should be either cleaned thoroughly or replaced. Otherwise, they may spread mold spores into the air.
- After systems are inspected, keep your home cool (no more than 4°C (about 40°F) if possible) until all of the water is removed.
- If you use pumps or heaters powered by gasoline, kerosene or propane, install a carbon monoxide detector even in semi-enclosed spaces.
- Do NOT use flooded appliances, electrical outlets, switchboxes or fuse-breaker panels until an electrician or local authorities declare them safe.

- Follow recommendations made by local inspectors about parts or appliance replacement.
- Replace flood-affected filters and insulation inside furnaces, water heaters, refrigerators and freezers. It may be cheaper to replace the appliances.

Floor Drains

- Flush and clean floor drains and sump pumps with unscented detergent and water. Scrub them to remove greasy dirt.
- Clean or replace clogged drains or hire a professional to do it for you.

Structures

- Rinse and then clean all floors as soon as possible.
- Replace any flooring saturated by floodwater or sewage.
- Clean all interior wall and floor cavities with water and unscented detergent.
- Open walls and remove drywall, panelling and insulation up to at least 50 centimetres (20 inches) above the high-water line.
- Wash all surfaces with unscented detergent and rinse well.
- Air out or dehumidify the house until it is completely dry.

Carpets and Furniture

- Dry carpets during your first two days back at home, then clean them thoroughly. For large areas, hire a professional cleaner.
- If non-fabric furniture is only damp, let it dry and then brush the mud off.
- To test a material for dryness, tape clear food wrap to the item's surface. If the covered part turns darker than the surrounding material, it is still damp. Dry until this no longer happens.
- Hose off any dirt stuck to solid-wood furniture. Place furniture on blocks and run fans underneath it. Dry all wooden furniture by opening it up (drawers, doors) and airing it out.
- Throw out particleboard furniture, furniture cushions and coverings.

Clothing and Bedding

- Soiled clothing, bed linens and washable blankets (acrylic, cotton) should be washed with laundry detergent and warm or hot water. Use two complete washing cycles.
- Mattresses, box springs, futons, quilts, comforters, duvets and pillows cannot be adequately sanitized and should be thrown out.
- Scrape or hose off heavy dirt from washable clothing and let it air dry outside if possible.
- Soak badly soiled items overnight in clean, cold water and detergent.
- Non-washable clothing should be air dried thoroughly and then professionally dry cleaned.

Toys, Cooking Utensils and Food Containers

Follow these procedures for items that may end up in someone's mouth or are used for preparing or cooking food:

- For pots, pans, cutlery, glasses, dishes, food storage containers, etc. wash thoroughly with soap and water (more than once if very dirty), rinse and then dip (30 seconds) in a solution of 5 mL (one teaspoon) of household bleach per one litre (four cups) of water and air dry. Alternatively, after washing and rinsing, everything (except for glasses) can be boiled for one minute and then air dried. Since dishes are easier to clean, a lower bleach concentration can be used and rinsing is not needed.

- For non-porous toys, a stronger concentration of disinfectant is usually needed with a longer contact time. Wash non-porous toys thoroughly with soap and water (disinfectant will not work if there is still visible dirt), rinse, then soak for five to 10 minutes in a solution of up to 15 mL (one tablespoon) of household bleach per litre (four cups) of water. Rinse well, then air dry.
- Cracked, chipped or hard to clean kitchenware should be thrown out.
- Throw out stuffed toys because they cannot be easily cleaned.
- After thoroughly washing, counters and food preparation areas can be wiped with a clean cloth soaked in 15 mL (1 tablespoon) of bleach per litre (four cups) of water to disinfect.
- Other disinfectants can be used instead of bleach, please read the directions carefully.

Food and Medicine

- Undamaged canned goods which have been in contact with floodwater can be salvaged by removing the label and thoroughly washing with detergent, rinsing, then soaking for five minutes in a solution of 15 mL (one tablespoon) of bleach per litre (four cups) of water. Rinse with water, then air dry. After drying, the contents can be identified by marking the can with a felt pen.
- Food or beverage products with a screw cap, crimped-cap or similar containers cannot be safely salvaged and should be thrown out.
- Throw out all jars of home-canned goods and any damaged canned goods, even if they haven't been exposed to floodwater; bacteria and mold spores can be airborne.
- Get rid of any medicine, cosmetics and toiletries that have been exposed to floodwater.
- Throw out fresh food (meat, fruit, vegetables) or food in boxes, bottles or damaged cans that have been exposed to floodwater.

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or go online to : <http://www.gov.mb.ca/flooding/factsheets.html>

Source: Manitoba Government Booklet: "What to do after the flood"

What do I do about mold after a flood?

Protect Yourself from Mold

After floods, excess moisture and standing water contribute to the growth of mold in homes and outbuildings. When returning home after a flood, mold may be present and could cause a health risk for your family.

People at Greatest Risk

Those at greatest risk from mold include people with:

- allergies, asthma, or other breathing conditions
- weak immune systems (such as people with HIV, chemotherapy patients)
- pregnant women
- young children
- elderly

Possible Health Effects

Most people will not have any health effects. People who are sensitive to mold may experience:

- stuffy nose, irritated eyes, wheezing, or skin irritation
- increased asthma symptoms or difficulty breathing
- mold infections in the lungs

If you or family members experience health problems after exposure to mold, contact your doctor or other health care provider.

Recognizing Mold

Sight

- Mold can appear as discoloration on walls or ceilings.
- Mold often appears as fuzzy black or green surface growth, but there are hundreds of species and many other colours.
- Mold will grow on almost any organic material, including wood, paper and fabric. It only takes 48 hours for mold to appear in damp materials.

Smell

- Mold can be detected by a bad smell. The odour is often musty, earthy or foul.

Cleaning Up Mold

Controlling moisture in your home is the most critical factor for preventing mold growth, so act quickly to dry out the building and remove damp materials that would support mold growth.

- Only clean mold yourself if the mold patch is less than 30 square feet (2.8 square meters). If the mold patch is larger, or if your heating, ventilation and air conditioning system is involved, hire a professional.
- People who are at greatest risk from mold should leave affected buildings until cleanup is complete.
- Wear a disposable respirator, disposable gloves and safety glasses. An N95 mask is considered a disposable respirator and is available at hardware stores. It should fit tightly to your face, and cover your nose and mouth. Surgical or dust masks do not provide enough protection.
- Mist the moldy surface lightly with rubbing alcohol before cleaning, to prevent mold from getting into the air during cleaning.

- Remove all porous items that have been wet for more than 48 hours and cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried. Wherever possible, porous materials such as drywall, wallpaper, insulation, ceiling tiles, fabric or carpet should be thrown out and replaced.
- Remove soaked drywall and other wall material, such as insulation, up to a 50 centimetres (20 inches) above the high water line. Leave walls open until the wood and building materials are completely dry, which can take up to several weeks. Superficial cleaning of wall materials such as drywall may be safe if you had a very brief flood in your basement and it was only a few inches deep.
- Non-porous materials such as metal, glass, hard plastic and semi-porous materials, such as wood and concrete, can be cleaned and reused if they are structurally sound. To remove mold from hard surfaces, use laundry or dish detergent and water. Use a stiff brush on rough-surface materials such as concrete.
- Throw away severely affected items and repair or replace damaged structures.
- Cleaned areas should be dry and free of any visible contamination when the work is complete.
- Wash all clothing thoroughly with hot water and detergent and dry it quickly. This includes clothes worn when cleaning a mold-contaminated area.
- If it's dry enough, temporarily store items outside of the home until insurance claims can be filed.

Clean-Up Precautions

- Avoid using chlorine bleach to clean large patches of mold. If you use bleach to spot-clean small patches, use it with caution. Wear rubber gloves and eye protection to avoid chemical burns.
- Don't mix bleach with other chemical cleaners or disinfectants because it may cause toxic fumes.
- If using other chemical disinfectants such as TSP, follow the instructions on the package.
- Vacuuming may increase the spread of mold and spores by making them go into the air. Central vacuums that exhaust to the outside, or those equipped with high-efficiency particulate air filters (HEPA) will minimize this exposure.
- No special restrictions apply to throwing out moldy materials, although they should be sealed in plastic bags if possible.

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Source: Manitoba Government Fact Sheet: "What do I do about mold after a flood?"