



STATE OF OHIO

Emergency Operations Center

NEWS RELEASE

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TIPS TO PROTECT YOUR HEALTH DURING COLD WEATHER FLOOD CLEAN-UP

With the weather turning colder and many Ohioans turning their focus on cleaning up after flooding, it is important to remember safety tips, for cleaning up and also for staying warm. The Ohio Emergency Management Agency, the Ohio Department of Health, the Ohio Department of Agriculture and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency recommend the following tips to protect yourself and your family from health hazards posed during clean-up efforts after severe flooding.

Hypothermia – Hypothermia is a drop in body temperature, often caused by staying in a cool place for too long is called. Long exposure when it's wet, windy and 30 to 50 degrees can be just as hazardous as dry, calm subzero weather. Wet clothes quickly draw heat from the body. In extremely cold weather, no one should participate in outdoor sports activities alone. People should drink plenty of nonalcoholic beverages to stay hydrated in cold, dry air

Signs of hypothermia include: confusion or memory loss; sleepiness; slowed, slurred speech or shallow breathing; weak pulse or low blood pressure; exhaustion; a change in behavior during cold weather or a change in the way a person normally looks; a lot of shivering or no shivering, stiffness in the arms or legs; and poor control over body movements or slow reactions. While waiting for help to arrive, you can keep the person warm and dry. Wrap the person in blankets, coats, towels - whatever you may have available. Your own body can serve as warmth. Lie close, but be gentle. Rubbing the skin of an older adult can make problems worse because his/her skin is thinner and could easily be torn or injured by vigorous rubbing. Set the thermostat for at least 68 to 70 degrees.

Clean up – Anyone who receives a puncture wound contaminated with sewage, soil or saliva during clean up should check with their physician to see if a tetanus booster is necessary. Factors include the person's vaccine history, date of the last does received and type of injury.

Mold – Mold is likely to be a problem in flooded homes and has the potential to affect the health of all family members. All water must be removed and leaks fixed before cleaning.

- Clean hard surfaces with a bleach and water solution.
- Ventilate the area when using chlorine bleach.
- Wear a filter mask and gloves to avoid contact with the mold.
- Let bleach and water sit for 15 minutes; then dry the area thoroughly.
- Porous materials, such as carpeting, wallboard, insulation, wallpaper and furniture, which are wet and can not be cleaned or dried, should be discarded because they can be a mold source.

Simple ways to dry and clean your house - If the humidity outside is lower than indoors, and if the weather permits, open doors and windows.

- Use fans to move the air and dry your home. Do not use central air conditioning or the furnace blower if the ducts were under water. They will blow dirty air that might contain contaminants.

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- Use dehumidifiers and window air conditioners, especially in closed areas.
- Open closets and cabinet doors to promote air circulation.
- Use a contractor who specializes in drying flooded buildings.

Food Safety - Food that comes in contact with floodwater can pose a serious health risk. The Ohio Department of Health recommends throwing away any product if there is doubt about its safety. Eating food exposed to floodwaters may cause serious illness or death. Throw away all food containers that are bulging, leaking or dented, even if no sign of a leak is obvious because bacteria can pass through openings too small for liquids.

ODH also recommends throwing away home-canned goods if the tops have been exposed to flooding. Food in paper containers, cloth or cardboard packaging that has been exposed to the water should also be discarded, along with soft drinks and ketchup bottles using capped containers.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, all can goods that have come into contact with the floodwaters should be thrown away.

Water Safety - If you have a private well, run cold water for about 30 minutes to allow the well to recharge naturally. Do not save the water. Then have the well disinfected and tested before drinking or using for cooking. If you are concerned about the safety of your tap water, boil it vigorously for at least three minutes. If you cannot boil it, add five drops of bleach to each gallon of water. Mix thoroughly and let stand for 30 minutes. This method should be used only with water that is clean in appearance and free of odors.

Throw away kitchen items that are unable to be cleaned - Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples, and pacifiers. There is no way to safely clean them if they have come in contact with contaminated flood waters.

Disinfect dishes, cookware, and utensils - Take apart any item that can be cleaned in pieces, including handles of pots if possible. If you have a dishwasher and the hot water temperature is at least 140 degrees F, use a long wash cycle and heated drying cycle to clean and disinfect dishwasher-safe items. For all other items, wash in a strong detergent solution, use a brush to remove dirt, and rinse in hot water. Glass, porcelain, china, plastic dinnerware, and enamelware should be immersed for 10 minutes in a solution of two tablespoons of chlorine bleach in one gallon of hot water. Silverware, metal utensils, pots, and pans should be boiled in safe water for 10 minutes -- do not use chlorine bleach with metals because it could darken them. Air-dry dishes.

Clean all appliances - Wash all refrigerators and freezers according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Verify that they are in good working order, especially if the motor has been under water. The recommended temperature for a refrigerator to be set at is between 30 and 36 degrees F and for a freezer is between five degrees below zero and 10 degrees above zero F.

Cleaning Up Heating Oil Releases - Safety and protection of your family is paramount, so evacuation may be necessary due to health and fire hazards from released oil. If oil is flowing from your tank or lines, immediately contact your local emergency services, then contact your local oil supplier, as well as Ohio EPA at 1-800-282-9348.

Hiring a professional spill response service as soon as possible is strongly recommended and remember: the area MUST be properly ventilated before any cleanup work takes place. Check to see if closing a valve on the tank will stop or slow the flow of oil and determine if the spill can be contained if the flow is minimal. If the tank is outside, determine if a containment dike can be constructed from sand, peat moss, rags, sawdust, old carpets or kitty litter. After use, double-bag the materials and contact your local solid waste landfill on what is acceptable for disposal.