

Returning home after a flood

Flood water can contain lots of nasty bugs that could make you and your family sick. Before you start the clean-up process, it's important to follow these steps to keep you and your family safe.

Preparing to return home

1. Returning home after a significant flood event can be a very emotional and distressing time as your home may not look the same.

Try to prepare yourselves and your loved ones for this. If you need support, please contact one of the helplines or local support networks.

2. Floodwaters may continue to threaten your property. Only return home after council staff have inspected your home for safety and given you permission to return.

- DO NOT use your power/gas until your supplier has checked and informed you that it is safe to use.
- If possible, keep children and animals away from flooded areas.
- Before you start cleaning up, take photos of your home and the damage caused as evidence to give your insurance company.

Drinking water and food safety

Do not drink water from the tap until council has advised the drinking water is safe. If you have received a 'boil water notice' – please follow the instructions.

If you do not have safe running water for drinking, cooking and brushing teeth, boil water by bringing it to a rolling boil for 1 minute or until the jug turns off automatically. Or add 5 drops of household bleach per litre of water (or half a teaspoon for 10 litres) and leave for 30 minutes. Only use plain unscented bleach (don't use Janola as it contains detergents).

Knowing what is safe to eat during the 'clean-up' phase after an emergency can become a guessing game. The guidelines are:

- Throw away all food that has come into contact with flood waters.
- Any food that retains ice crystals and where the packaging has not been damaged or opened can be safely refrozen.
- Foods that have been defrosted can still be used if they have just recently defrosted and can be kept cold, i.e. the fridge is working again.

- Defrosted food cannot be refrozen.
- Inspect the food – does it smell or appear different? Has the colour changed and does it have a slimy texture? If so, it's probably unsafe to eat.
- Do not use any tinned food that has been damaged (for example if the can has split seams or has been punctured).

The clean-up

- Cover any cuts or wounds before you start cleaning up to help protect you from bugs.
- Dust, silt, mud and soil in the air can harm your health by getting into your lungs and airways. This can damage your lungs. Coughing, lots of mucus and shortness of breath are all signs to watch out for. If you are worried about what dust is doing to your health, call Healthline 0800 611 116.
- Properly fitting masks are the best protection, like P2 and N95 masks. However, even surgical masks will still help. Make sure masks fit correctly. Straps should go above and below the ears.

- Be aware that muddy floodwaters/sludge can contain sharp objects like nails and broken glass. Wear closed toe, sturdy footwear to prevent injuries. If you are injured, treat cuts and puncture wounds immediately to help prevent infection. Wash cuts and puncture wounds with clean water then apply a clean bandage. If your wound becomes infected or if you are not up-to-date with your tetanus vaccinations call your GP or Healthline on 0800 611 116.
- Anyone coming into contact with silt should wash and dry their hands and/or use hand sanitiser.
- If possible, wear cleaning gloves, sturdy shoes and protective clothing.
- Use ordinary cleaning products and follow standard instructions. Do not mix products.
- If you are drying your property naturally, keep doors and windows open as much as possible. If using dehumidifiers, close external doors and windows.

Hard surfaces (floors, walls, tables and benches)

Scrub first with clean water and dishwashing liquid to remove all visible dirt. Then wipe down with a household disinfectant, for example 2 cups of bleach to 10 litres of water.

Kitchen utensils

Wash cooking, eating, and any other kitchen utensils in clean hot soapy water.

Rinse thoroughly then disinfect by immersing for 1 minute in a solution of 500 ml (about two cups) of plain, unperfumed household bleach in 10 litres of water.

Rinse again in safe water. Alternatively, boil all utensils for one minute and let cool.

Appliances (fridges, freezers and electrical goods)

Do not use electrical products if they have been soaked in water. If unsure, throw them out.

Soft furnishings, clothing, blankets and curtains

Take out everything that is wet and that can be moved – floor coverings, furniture, bedding, clothing and so on. Thoroughly wash and disinfect all items and dry in the sunshine.

Get rid of items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected. Large items, such as mattresses that have been soaked in flood waters, should be discarded.

Remember: you could also contact local dry cleaners and carpet cleaners to assist.

Garden produce

Do not eat garden produce if the soil has been flooded.

Clean-up any debris and sprinkle with garden lime to stop smells and flies. Lime can be purchased from your local garden shop.

Outside areas

Remove solid materials (sanitary products, toilet paper and faecal matter) and place in sealed bags.

A garden hose is useful for washing down the outside of the property to remove silt, salt deposits and fine debris but do not use high-pressure hoses as they can blast contaminated matter into the air.

Garden lime can be used to help disinfect the area.

Mould

If mould has developed on surfaces, take extra care when cleaning.

- Clean the mould off as soon as possible to reduce exposure to mould spores.
- Use protective clothing and a suitable mask.
- Use soap and water to clean the surface then apply a commercial mould product or household bleach solution.
- For large areas consult a mould removal specialist.

Look after yourself and others

- If you feel unwell, contact a doctor or ring Healthline 0800 611 116
- Need to talk? Free call or text 1737 anytime.
- Help vulnerable people, like infants or elderly.