



See Tip Sheet *“The First 48 Hours”* for information on how to get started in a range of emergencies.

HEALTH & SAFETY AFTER FLOODING

This document contains general guidance; however, you should consult with your physician and local health department about precautions for your specific situation.

Never enter a disaster area until it has been cleared for reentry by emergency responders.

Floodwater and Its Hazards

- Floodwater can contain any or all of the following: infectious organisms, fuels, industrial or agricultural chemicals (including heavy metals), and mosquitoes, which carry disease. Assume all floodwaters and anything that is wet with floodwater is contaminated. Snakes, alligators, and rats are also often found in floodwater, so exercise caution at all times.
- Assume all water is hazardous until local authorities deem it safe. Bottled water is your safest option for drinking. Water contaminated with fuel or other chemicals will not be made safe by boiling or disinfection.

Mold

- In water-impacted buildings, mold will develop quickly - as a general rule, after 48-72 hours, but in hot and humid conditions, that time may be significantly shorter. Mold can cause irritation to the airways, skin, and eyes. For detailed information on mold removal, see the Tip Sheet on Mold in Collections.

Personal Safety

- Wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) at all times when in floodwater-contaminated areas, including a tight-fitting respirator with a HEPA filter, head protection, splash goggles, Tyvek outer clothing, and watertight boots.
- Goggles without vent holes are recommended and should be cleaned regularly with alcohol. Wear hair covering. Clothes or Tyvek suits and booties should be removed when leaving the contaminated site. Discard Tyvek suits and booties, and wash clothes in hot water.
- Wear latex or nitrile gloves, replacing them regularly. However, if there are hazardous chemicals in the water, nitrile may not provide enough protection, and

you may need heavy-duty gloves. If using nitrile gloves, consider double gloving when working with objects that may tear your gloves.

- Wash your hands with soap and CLEAN, running water, whenever you remove gloves, but especially before breaks, meals, and the end of the work shift. If you have any open cuts or sores that were exposed to floodwater, wash them with soap and water and apply an antibiotic ointment to discourage infection. Seek medical attention for cuts that become infected.
- To protect yourself from hazardous chemicals, wear chemical-resistant outer clothing (Tyvek) and goggles (NOT safety glasses). Wear rubber or plastic boots and plastic (PVC rubber or nitrile) gloves, and consider duct taping protective clothing openings to keep water out. Use a respirator with chemical AND particulate cartridges.
- Keep exposed skin to a minimum: wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and insect repellent to keep from being bitten by mosquitoes and other insects.

Floodwater-Borne and Mold-Related Illnesses

- If at any time the following or other unexplained symptoms develop, seek medical attention immediately.
- Symptoms from infectious bacteria and viruses will often be similar to food poisoning: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, muscle aches, and fever.
- Symptoms from exposure to chemicals may vary depending on the chemical, but often manifest in headaches, skin rashes, dizziness, nausea, excitability, weakness, and fatigue.
- Symptoms from mold exposure may include nasal stuffiness, throat irritation, coughing, wheezing, eye irritation, and skin irritation.

Resources

- AIC Health and Safety Committee: [AIC Wiki > Health and Safety > Health and Safety in Emergency Response](#).
- American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA): [AIHA Bodies of Work Resource Finder > Health and Safety Issues in Natural Disasters](#).
- [CDC.gov > Health Topics > Natural Disasters and Severe Weather > Health and Safety Concerns for All Hazards > Guidelines for Cleaning Safely After a Disaster](#):