



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

**Kidder County District Health Unit**

# Clean Up After a Flood

Flooding is the most common disaster in the U.S. and can cause a variety of problems to urban and rural communities. However, by utilizing these suggestions, you can learn how to stay safe before, during and after a flood.

## PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Cleaning up after a flood starts with protecting yourself with the right safety gear:

- N95 Mask (or respirator) with more protection
- Hard Hat
- Goggles
- Heavy Gloves
- Waterproof Boots with Steel Toe and Insole
- Earplugs or Protective Headphones
- Fire Extinguishers

## FLOODWATER DANGERS

Floodwater can contain a variety of dangerous materials, depending on the areas that flooded. This includes sewage, vehicle fluids including, but not limited to, gas and oil, animal, agricultural and/or industrial waste. While skin contact with floodwater may not pose a serious health risk on its own, anything eaten or drank that is contaminated with the floodwater can cause many different health concerns.

If you have open cuts, sores or wounds that may be exposed to floodwater, keep them as clean as possible by washing them with soap and applying an antibiotic ointment to discourage infection. If working in water colder than 75 degrees, reduce cold-related risks by wearing rubber insulated boots and insulated layers. Take frequent breaks out of the water and change into dry clothing when possible.

## WHILE CLEANING DEBRIS

Cleaning up after a flood is a big job. Emotions will likely be running high as you are cleaning, so it is important to remember to take time for your physical and mental well-being.

- Clean up with a plan. Decide what tasks are most important and focus on those initially. This will help keep you from feeling overwhelmed.
- Rest when you need to.
- If working in hot conditions, stay cool with air conditioning, take breaks in shaded areas, drink plenty of water and wear light, loose-fitting clothing.
- Do outdoor activities during cooler hours.
- Get help when lifting heavy or awkward objects.
- Work in a group to avoid injuries.
- Don't be afraid to ask for support from friends, family, counselors, therapists.



## WHEN ENTERING DAMAGED BUILDINGS

- Avoid damaged buildings/structures until a professional has examined it and verified it is safe.
- If a house or building has been closed for several days, open doors and windows to let it air out for at least 30 minutes before you stay for any length of time.
- Return to buildings during the day, so it's easier to identify and avoid hazards.
- Be aware of your surroundings. If you hear strange noises, leave the building or structure. It may be about to collapse.
- If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open windows, and leave the house immediately.
- Keep children and pets away from the area until clean up is completed.

## CHILDREN

- Keep children and pets away from debris.
- Do not allow children to play in flood water.
- Wash hands with soap and clean water after working. Clean and cover open wounds.
- Disinfect toys with diluted bleach. When in doubt, throw toys out.
- Children should not help with clean-up efforts. Do not use N95 masks on children.
- Keep children away from stray/dead animals.
- Use insect repellent with DEET or Picaridin on children when outside.

## ELECTRICAL HAZARDS

- If electrical circuits and/or equipment are wet or near water, turn off power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel. If you must enter standing water to access the main power switch, call an electrician to turn it off.
- Avoid standing in water while powering on or using an electric tool or appliance.
- Do not connect generators to your home's electrical circuits without the approved, automatic-interrupt devices. If a generator is online when electrical service is restored it may become a fire hazard and endanger line workers in your area.

## FOOD

- If floodwater has entered your freezer or refrigerator, dispose of all food not sealed in metal, airtight cans or glass jars.
- If power has interrupted for only a short time, keep your freezer or refrigerator doors closed. This helps prevent food spoilage or thawing.
- A full freezer will stay colder than an empty, or partially full, one. A freezer full of meat will stay cold longer than a freezer filled with baked goods.
- You may want to use dry ice to keep food cool. Wear gloves to handle dry ice and proceed as recommended.

## MOLD

- If a home or building has been flooded and been closed for several days, assume it has mold. Mold can present serious health risks to your family.

**SOURCE:** CDC, NDSU Extension Service, ND Department of Health



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