

Flood Cleanup

Before Entering a Flooded House

- Turn off the electrical main power if it can be done from a dry location. **Never** turn power on or off while standing in water. Don't turn the power back on until electrical systems are inspected by a qualified electrician.
- If natural gas or propane appliances have been extinguished by the water, turn off the gas. If you smell gas, notify emergency authorities and don't use electricity, light matches, smoke, or do anything that can cause a spark until you are told it is safe.
- If the house has been closed up for several days, enter briefly to open doors and windows and then wait outside for at least 30 minutes to allow the house to air out.

Drying Out a Flooded House

- If it is safe to use electricity, use a "wet-dry" shop vacuum or a pump to remove water.
- If you don't have electricity, or it isn't safe to turn it on, a portable generator can be used to power equipment to remove standing water. **Never** use gasoline powered equipment or propane powered dryers in enclosed areas such as a house or garage, [carbon monoxide poisoning](#) can occur.
- Set dehumidifiers and fans to blow exhaust air outside to help drying.
- Heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems that have been contaminated with flood water need to be professionally cleaned and checked before being turned on.
- Assume there is mold growth if your home has been flooded and closed for several days. Mold growth can be hidden in areas behind wall paper, on the backside of wall board, under carpets, and in insulation.
 - [CDC's tips on protecting yourself from mold after a disaster](#).
 - Consider hiring an professional for extensive flood and mold cleanup, see [L&I's tips for hiring a contractor](#).
- Follow these [guidelines if your basement has been flooded](#).

Cleaning a Flooded House

Flood water is divided into three categories that require different cleanup measures. **Clear** water is tap or rain water. **Gray** water is from sinks, showers, tubs, and washers. **Black** water is contaminated with human and/or animal waste. Flood water from lakes or rivers is considered **black** water.

Clear Water (Tap or Rain Water)

- Remove standing water as soon as possible.
- Clean washable items in a washing machine with detergent.
- Clean hard surfaces with soap and water.
- Use a "wet-dry" shop vacuum to remove water from beds and couches. Dry within 24-48 hours.
- Clean and dry carpets within 24-48 hours, or remove.
- Plaster and plasterboard that have been saturated should be removed and replaced to at least 4 inches above the water line.

Gray Water (Sink, Shower, Tub, and Washer Water)

- Keep children and pets out of the area until cleanup has been completed.
- Remove standing water as soon as possible.
- Clean washable items in a washing machine with detergent.
- Clean hard surfaces with soap and water.
- Use a “wet-dry” shop vacuum to remove water from beds and couches and dry within 24-48 hours.
- Clean and dry carpets within 24-48 hours or remove.
- Plaster and plasterboard that have been saturated should be removed and replaced to at least 4 inches above the water line.
- Mops and brooms, and other items used in cleaning should be thoroughly washed and disinfected. Rinse thoroughly with water and then soak in a quaternary ammonia cleaner for at least ten minutes **OR** in a bleach solution. Never mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner. Rinse thoroughly with water, wring out, and dry thoroughly outside in the open air.

Black Water (River, Lake - Contains Human or Animal Waste)

- Wear rubber gloves, eye goggles, and an N-95 respiratory mask when cleaning. Change work clothes and boots and wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after working in the contaminated area.
- Keep children and pets out of the contaminated area until clean up has been completed.
- Remove standing water as soon as possible. Ask your local health department for directions on removal and disposal.
- Clean washable items in a washing machine with detergent and hot water. Wash contaminated items separately from those that were not contaminated.
- Clean hard surfaces with soap and water.
- Remove and dispose items that cannot be washed and disinfected (mattresses, carpet, carpet padding, upholstered furniture, stuffed animals, baby toys, pillows, books, and most foam and paper products).
- Remove and replace plaster and plasterboard that have been saturated at least 4 inches above the water line.
- Mops and brooms, and other items used in cleaning should be thoroughly washed and disinfected. Rinse thoroughly with water and then soak in a quaternary ammonia cleaner for at least ten minutes **OR** in a bleach solution. Never mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner. Rinse thoroughly with water, wring out, and dry thoroughly outside in the open air.

Washing Hands and Cleaning Canned Food

- Wash hands with soap and water after handling contaminated material. If clean tap water is not available for washing use:
 - Water that has been boiled for one minute and then cooled.
 - Water disinfected for personal hygiene (solution of 1/8 teaspoon of household bleach per 1 gallon of water). Let it stand for 30 minutes before use. If the water is cloudy, use a solution of 1/4 teaspoon of household bleach per 1 gallon of water.
- Don't eat food contaminated by flooding. Canned food can be cleaned, see [CDC's cleaning and sanitizing with bleach after an emergency](#).

Bleach Disinfectant Solution

Mix 3/4 cup regular household bleach per one gallon of clean water. [Never mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner](#). Read and follow product label directions. Wear rubber gloves and eye protection. Use in a well ventilated room. Bleach is a disinfectant, not a cleaner, and is not effective on dirty surfaces. It should only be used after cleaning with soap and water.

More Resources

- [Emergency Preparedness and Response to Floods - CDC](#)
- [Flood Cleanup and Indoor Air Quality - EPA](#)
- [Septic Systems, What to Do after the Flood - EPA](#)
- [Floods - FEMA](#)