



PROTECTING YOUR HEALTH AFTER FLOODING

Important steps to take once flood waters recede

March 22, 2019 – Flood waters can rise quickly and cover your property, as they did recently in Newaygo County. Before life resumes to normal, there are several important steps that must be taken to prevent serious illness or injury to you and your loved ones. District Health Department #10 (DHD#10) advises that you proceed with caution and be aware that your home may be contaminated with sewage and mold. Consider the following steps from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):

WATER SUPPLY – DO NOT DRINK WELL WATER UNTIL IT IS TESTED. Because of the extensive flood area and the speed and direction of ground water flow, your well may not be a safe source of water for many months after a flood. The well can become contaminated with bacteria and other contaminants. If you have a private residential well and flood waters surrounded your well head, you should get the water sampled for bacteria before use. If the flood waters covered the well head, assume that your well water is contaminated, and have it chlorinated and tested before use. Contact DHD#10 or come in to the health department in your area to pick up a water testing kit.

SEPTIC SYSTEM – DO NOT USE THE SEWAGE SYSTEM UNTIL FLOOD WATER HAS RECEDED AND THE GROUND HAS DRIED UP. Have your septic tank professionally inspected and serviced if you suspect damage. Signs of damage include settling or an inability to accept water. Most septic tanks are not damaged by flooding since they are below ground and completely covered. However, septic tanks and pump chambers can fill with silt and debris and must be professionally cleaned. If the soil absorption field is clogged with silt, a new system may have to be installed.

FOOD – DO NOT EAT ANY FOOD THAT MAY HAVE COME IN CONTACT WITH FLOOD WATER. Discard any food and beverage that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come in contact with flood water. Food containers that are not waterproof include those with screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops, and crimped caps. Also discard any cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes and home canned goods if they come in contact with flood water because they cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized. Thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes, and utensils with soap and water. Rinse well and sanitize them by boiling in clean water or immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented household (5.25% concentration) liquid bleach per gallon of water.

MOLD – DISCARD EVERYTHING THAT CANNOT BE DRIED OUT AND DISINFECTED. Mold can start growing inside a house a day or two after flooding occurs. The safest step to take is contacting a mold remediation company or water damage specialist to make sure the mold is properly cleaned up. If you plan to perform flood clean up yourself, begin by removing items from the home that did not get wet to protect them while you clean the rest of the house. Remove floodwater, dirt, and debris from your home with buckets, mops, or pumping equipment. Drying out your home as quickly as possible can minimize mold issues. Open windows for ventilation and use dehumidifiers, fans, or heaters, but only if it is safe to use electrical appliances. Remove all flooded carpet, drywall, wall paneling, and insulation. Then take wet household items, such as furniture and boxes, outside. Putting them in plastic bags first may help



MEDIA CONTACT

Jeannine Taylor
Public Information Officer
O: 231-876-3823
C: 231-920-4998
E: jtaylor@dhd10.org



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prevent mold from spreading. Later you will have to decide if it is best to throw them away or clean them before bringing them back inside. Now you must thoroughly clean and disinfect every surface within the entire house using regular household cleaners, disinfectants, or antifungal solutions. Before you move back in, your house must be completely dry and mold-free.

For more information and resources for flood cleanup, visit: www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/resources-flood-cleanup-and-indoor-air-quality. Contact your local DHD#10 for information on water testing at 888-217-3904.

About DHD #10

District Health Department #10 (DHD #10) is Michigan's largest geographical health department, mandated to promote and protect the public from unsafe and hazardous conditions and provide methods of promoting good health and disease prevention. Some of the vital programs provided by DHD #10 include Immunizations, Infectious Disease Control, STI Testing and Counseling, WIC, Maternal Infant Health Program, Healthy Families Northern Michigan, Children's Special Health Services, Hearing and Vision Screening, Family Planning, Cancer Screening, Worksite Wellness, Smoking Cessation, Substance Use Prevention, Chronic Disease Prevention, and Environmental Health Services. DHD #10 serves Crawford, Kalkaska, Lake, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Missaukee, Newaygo, Oceana, and Wexford counties. For more information, visit www.dhd10.org.

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