



Important Information For Residents: Returning Home Following a Flood

The Tulare County Public Health Department strongly advises when returning to your home after a flood to be aware that flood water may contain sewage. Protect yourself and your family by following these steps:

Inside the Home

- Keep children and pets out of the affected area until cleanup has been completed.
- When returning to your home after a flooding emergency, please be aware that flood water may contain sewage. Wear rubber boots, rubber gloves, and goggles during cleanup of affected area.
- Remove and discard items that cannot be washed and disinfected due to contamination from sewage water (such as, mattresses, carpeting, carpet padding, rugs, upholstered furniture, cosmetics, stuffed animals, baby toys, pillows, foam-rubber items, books, wall coverings, and most paper products).
 - If these items have been determined not to have been exposed to sewage, you may choose to air dry mattresses and upholstered furniture in the sun and then spray them thoroughly with a disinfectant (one cup of bleach to five gallons of water).
- Remove and discard drywall and insulation that has been contaminated with sewage or flood waters.
- Thoroughly clean all hard surfaces (such as flooring, concrete, molding, wood and metal furniture, countertops, appliances, sinks, and other plumbing fixtures) with hot water and laundry or dish detergent and disinfect these surfaces with a solution of one cup of bleach to five gallons of water to prevent mold.
- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water.
 - For infants, use only pre-prepared canned baby formula that requires no added water, rather than powdered formulas prepared with treated water.
 - Discard any refrigerated or frozen food that has been at room temperature or without electricity for two hours or more and any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture.

- After completing the cleanup, wash your hands with soap and warm water. Use water that has been boiled for 1 minute (allow the water to cool before washing your hands).
 - Or you may use water that has been disinfected for personal hygiene use (solution of ½ teaspoon [-0.75 milliliters] of household bleach per 1 gallon of water). Let it stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy, use a solution of 1 ½ teaspoons (-1.5 milliliters) of household bleach per 1 gallon of water.
- Wash all clothes worn during the cleanup in hot water and detergent. These clothes should be washed separately from uncontaminated clothes and linens.
- Wash clothes contaminated with flood or sewage water in hot water and detergent. It is recommended that a laundromat be used for washing large quantities of clothes and linens until your onsite waste-water system has been professionally inspected and serviced.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you become injured or ill.

Outside the Home

- Keep children and pets out of the affected area until cleanup has been completed.
- Wear rubber boots, rubber gloves, and goggles during cleanup of affected area.
- Have your onsite waste-water system professionally inspected and serviced if you suspect damage.
- Wash all clothes worn during the cleanup in hot water and detergent. These clothes should be washed separately from uncontaminated clothes and linens.
- After completing the cleanup, wash your hands with soap and warm water. Use water that has been boiled for 1 minute (allow the water to cool before washing your hands).
 - Or you may use water that has been disinfected for personal hygiene use (solution of ½ teaspoon [-0.75 milliliters] of household bleach per 1 gallon of water). Let it stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy, use solution of 1 ½ teaspoons (-1.5 milliliters) of household bleach per 1 gallon of water.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you become injured or ill.

Health Risks

Flood waters and standing waters pose various risks, including infectious diseases, chemical hazards, and injuries.

Infectious Diseases

Diarrheal Diseases

Eating or drinking anything contaminated by flood water can cause diarrheal disease. To protect yourself and your family:

- Practice good hygiene (i.e. handwashing) after contact with flood waters.
- Do not allow children to play in flood water areas.
- Wash children's hands frequently (always before meals).
- Do not allow children to play with toys that have been contaminated by flood water and have not been disinfected.
- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water.

Wound Infections

Open wounds and rashes exposed to flood waters can become infected. To protect yourself and your family:

- Avoid exposure to flood waters if you have an open wound.
- Cover open wounds with a waterproof bandage.
- Keep open wounds as clean as possible by washing well with soap and clean water.
- If a wound develops redness, swelling, or drainage, seek immediate medical attention.
- If you receive a puncture wound contaminated with feces, soil or saliva, ask a doctor or health department whether a tetanus booster is necessary.

Chemical Hazards

Be aware of potential chemical hazards during floods. Flood waters may have moved hazardous chemical containers of solvents or other industrial chemicals from their normal storage places. If any propane tanks (whether 20-lb. tanks from a gas grill or household propane tanks) are discovered, do not attempt to move them yourself. These represent a very real danger of fire or explosion, and if they are found, police, fire departments or your State Fire Marshal's office should be contacted immediately. Car batteries, even those in flood water, may still contain an electrical charge and should be removed with extreme caution by using insulated gloves. Avoid coming in contact with any acid that may have spilled from a damaged car battery.

How to Deal with Electric and Gas Utilities

Electrical power and natural gas or propane tanks should be shut off to avoid fire, electrocution or explosions until it is safe to use them. Use battery-powered flashlights and lanterns, rather than candles, gas lanterns or torches. If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open all windows and leave the house immediately. Notify the gas company or the police or fire departments or State Fire Marshal's office, and do not turn on the lights or do anything that could cause a spark. Avoid any downed power lines, particularly those in water. All electrical equipment and appliances must be completely dry before using them. You should have a certified electrician check these items if there is any question. Also, remember not to operate any gas-powered equipment indoors.

It is strongly advised to contact a professional septic service provider if your property has been flooded and uses a septic system.

Further Information:

Please contact Tulare County Public Health or Environmental Health for further questions at 559-624-7400.

Other Resources: <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/after.html>