

Ask CDC

After a Flood

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

Welcome to *Ask CDC*, the weekly podcast that answers *your* questions. I'm your host, Susan Laird.

Our question this week is from a couple who want to know what they can do to help their married children recover from a flood.

First, we're sorry your family is going through this challenge. It's very difficult to clean up after a flood, and there are several things you must keep in mind.

To prevent illness from food:

- Throw away food that may have come in contact with flood or storm water.
- Throw away canned foods that are bulging, opened, or damaged.
- Throw away food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture.
- Throw away perishable foods, including meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftovers that have been above 40 degrees Fahrenheit for two hours or more.
- Thawed food that contains ice crystals or is 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below can be refrozen or cooked.
- If cans have come in contact with flood water or storm water, remove the labels, wash the cans, and dip them in a solution of one cup of bleach in five gallons of water. Re-label the cans with a marker.
- While the power is out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. Add block ice or dry ice to your refrigerator if the electricity is expected to be off longer than four hours.

To prevent illness from water:

Listen to and follow public announcements. Local authorities will tell you if tap water is safe to drink or to use for cooking or bathing. If the water isn't safe to use, follow local instructions to use bottled water or to boil or disinfect water for cooking, cleaning, or bathing.

To correctly boil or disinfect water: Hold water at a rolling boil for one minute to kill bacteria. If you can't boil water, add 1/8 teaspoon of newly purchased, unscented liquid household bleach per gallon of water. Stir the water well, and let it stand for 30 minutes before you use it. You can use water-purifying tablets instead of boiling water or using bleach.

For infants who drink formula, use *only* pre-prepared, canned baby formula. Don't use powdered formulas prepared with treated water.

Disinfect children's toys that have come in contact with flood or otherwise contaminated water. Use a solution of no more than 1 cup of bleach in 5 gallons of water to disinfect the toys. Let

them air dry after cleaning. Some toys, such as stuffed animals and baby toys, cannot be disinfected; they should be discarded.

It's extremely important to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.

Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that is produced by many types of equipment and is poisonous to breathe. Don't use a generator, pressure washer, charcoal grill, camp stove, or other gasoline- or charcoal-burning device inside your home, basement, or garage, or near a window, door, or vent. Any such device should be placed to exhaust at least 25 feet away from work or living areas. Don't run a car or truck inside a garage attached to your house, even if you leave the door open. Don't heat your house with a gas oven. If your carbon monoxide detector sounds, leave your home immediately and call 911. Seek prompt medical attention if you feel dizzy, light-headed, or nauseated.

Avoid mosquitoes.

Prevent mosquito bites by wearing long pants, socks, and long-sleeved shirts and by using insect repellents that contain DEET or Picaridin.

Avoid unstable buildings and structures.

Stay away from damaged buildings or structures until they've been examined by a building inspector or other government authority and certified as safe. Leave immediately if you hear shifting or unusual noises that signal that the structure is about to fall.

Beware of wild or stray animals.

Avoid wild or stray animals. Take appropriate precautions to avoid animal bites and rabies exposure. Call local authorities to handle animals. Get rid of dead animals according to local guidelines.

Beware of electrical and fire hazards.

Never touch a fallen power line. Call the power company to report fallen power lines. Avoid contact with overhead power lines during cleanup and other activities. If electrical circuits and equipment have gotten wet or are in or near water, turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel. *Never* turn power on or off while standing in water. Don't turn the power back on until electrical equipment has been inspected by a qualified electrician. Don't burn candles near flammable items or leave candles unattended. If possible, use flashlights or other battery-operated lights instead of candles.

Beware of hazardous materials.

Wear protective clothing and gear, for example, a respirator if needed, when handling hazardous materials. Wash skin that may have come in contact with hazardous chemicals. Contact local authorities if you're not sure about how to handle or get rid of hazardous materials.

Clean up and prevent mold growth.

Clean up and dry out the building within 24 to 48 hours. Open doors and windows and use fans and dehumidifiers. Fans should be placed at a window or door to blow the air out rather than in, so as not to spread the mold. To *prevent* mold growth, clean wet items and surfaces with detergent and water. To *remove* mold growth, wear rubber gloves and protective eye wear, open

windows and doors, and clean with a bleach solution of no more than one cup of bleach in one gallon of water. If you plan to be inside the building for a while or you plan to clean up mold, you should buy an N95 mask at your local home supply store and wear it, following the instructions on the package for fitting. Throw away porous items, for example, carpet and upholstered furniture, that can't be dried quickly. Fix leaks in the roofs, walls, or plumbing.

For more information on what to do after a flood or other disaster, visit emergency.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.

Thanks for listening. To submit *your* question to *Ask CDC*, email us at askcdc@cdc.gov.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.