



Flood Cleanup Health Tips

Flood water is not like other water from lakes and streams. It may come into contact with raw sewage, trash and automotive and household chemicals and become contaminated. Several kinds of diarrheal illnesses are more common in areas that have flooded. When cleaning up after a flood, hand washing is the single most important thing you can do to protect your health. For this you need safe water.

Safe Water

Water supplied by the City of Billings or other municipality is carefully monitored to be safe. If your water comes from another source such as a well, spring or cistern which has been impacted by flooding, assume that the water is contaminated. Until flood waters recede and you can test and disinfect your water supply, it is safest to use bottled water for drinking, food preparation, handwashing and cleanup. You can buy bottled water or use your own clean bottles and fill them at a source know to be safe. Water can also be made safe in one of two ways.

1. Boil water for five minutes and store in a clean container. The flat taste can be eliminated by shaking the water in a bottle or pouring it from one container to another.
2. Mix 5 drops of household bleach with 1 quart of water (or 20 drops per gallon) and let stand for at least five minutes or longer (preferably 30 minutes to an hour) before drinking. Bleach should be unscented and free of detergents or additives. This water will be suitable for drinking, hand washing, and for washing pots and utensils. An insulated beverage container with a bottom spigot is useful for storing a small supply of water for drinking and cooking.

Safe Food

Any food that has been in contact with flood water should be thrown out! The only exception is food in an unopened, commercially sealed package or metal can. Clean and disinfect all packages and cans before opening by following these steps:

1. Remove labels, but mark the can in a way that will enable you to identify the contents after disinfection. Colored crayon, wax pencil, indelible marker, or adhesive tape may be used.
2. Wash cans in warm water and soap or detergent. Then rinse.
3. Soak the cans for at least 1½ to 2 minutes in a tub containing a disinfecting solution made by mixing a solution at the rate of 1 cup of household bleach to 5 gallons of water. Rinse the cans in clean water. **Caution: This concentration of bleach will damage some fabrics and may have a pungent odor. Use waterproof gloves and do not wash your hands in this solution.*
4. Re-inspect the packages. If there is any doubt about the integrity of any package, throw it out.

Be sure to use safe water for washing and preparing foods and washing dishes.

Safe Home

Approach any flood damaged areas with caution. Hazards may include harmful chemicals or sewage in the flood waters, as well as electrical hazards. After removing dirt and silt, walls and floors should be washed with warm water and detergent, rinsed, then disinfected with a chlorine solution (1 cup chlorine bleach with 5 gallons of water). Wear protective clothing and rubber gloves to cover limbs, feet and hands while cleaning up debris and scrubbing flood-damaged interiors and furniture. Give special attention to cleaning children's toys, cribs, and play equipment. Items a baby or toddler may put in his mouth should be boiled or disinfected. Discard all stuffed toys and items that are not easily cleaned.

You can find information on water testing, well disinfection and mold removal at <https://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/phep/donations/flood-events-2018>

Information from RiverStone Health Environmental Health Services. For more information, call 406.256.2770 or go to RiverStoneHealth.org.