



News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Health Department Recommendations for Re-Entering Your Home After Flood

Benton Harbor, MI – As community members recovering from recent heavy flooding begin to return to their homes, the Berrien County Health Department recommends that residents follow key actions to avoid health and safety risks.

Cleaning Up Your Home:

Homes that were flooded might have contaminants, like mold or sewage, left behind from the flood waters which can cause health risks to you and your family. The following tips will keep you safe as you clean, sanitize, and remove floodwaters from your home.

- Keep children and pets out of the affected area until cleanup has been completed.
- Wear personal protective equipment, including rubber boots, rubber gloves, a face mask, and goggles during cleanup of affected area.
- Walls, hard-surfaced floors, and many other household surfaces should be cleaned with soap and water and [disinfected with a bleach solution](#) of 1 cup of bleach to five gallons of water.
- Be particularly careful to thoroughly disinfect surfaces that may come in contact with food, such as counter tops, pantry shelves, refrigerators, etc. Areas where small children play should also be carefully cleaned.
- Remove and discard items that cannot be washed and disinfected (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).
- Help the drying process by using fans, air conditioning units, and dehumidifiers.
- After cleaning or after contact with flood water, make sure that all clothing and parts of the body that came in contact with the flood water are thoroughly washed in order to prevent the tracking of contaminated flood water into other areas of the home.
- Residents may want to get professional assistance from a damage restoration service to help with the cleaning and mold removal process.

Food Safety

Flood waters and power outages can make many foods in your home unsafe to eat and can affect your drinking water if you are connected to a private water well. To avoid eating contaminated food and to protect yourself and your family from illness, residents should follow these tips after a flood.

- Wash and sanitize the outside of undamaged cans and glass jars before opening.
- Throw away ALL baby food containers that were damaged or exposed to flood waters (such as lid button popped on baby food jars).

- Wash and sanitize reusable containers and kitchen ware (pots, pans, glassware, utensils...) before using again.
- Drink only bottled water until your private well has been determined safe.
- If packaging looks damaged or food smells bad throw it away – Don't taste it first!
- Wash and sanitize all surfaces, counters, appliances and cupboards that were exposed to flood waters.

The rule of thumb for all residents is 'when in doubt, throw it out'. Food safety following a flood is an important part of protecting individuals and families from food-borne and water-borne illnesses.

Drinking Water Quality

If you are connected to a private well, and flood waters have ponded around your well, your drinking water supply may be impacted from infiltration of contaminants around your well casing. Until your water supply has been determined safe to drink through bacteriological testing, consider it UNSAFE.

- Do not rely on filters.
- Drink only commercially bottled water or water you purify yourself.
- Boil water for at least 1 minute to purify.
- Contact Berrien County Health Department at (269) 926-7121 for information on testing your water supply for bacteriological contamination.

Preventing Health Hazards from Mold

If homes that experienced flooding were not able to be dried out within 24-48 hours, residents should assume that there is [mold growth](#). You may see or smell mold on clothing, drywall, furniture, cardboard boxes, or books, but it may also be hidden under or behind items like carpet, cushions, or walls. Exposure to mold can lead to asthma attacks, eye and skin irritation, and allergic reactions. It can lead to severe infections in people with weakened immune systems. Removing the mold hazard after flooding may be too difficult or dangerous of a job for individuals; it may be best to get help from an experienced and qualified mold remediation professional. More information on mold remediation for homeowners can be found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/mold/cleanup-guide.html>.

For more information on health and safety considerations after flooding, visit the Berrien County Health Department's webpage at: www.bchdmi.org.

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