

# Flood clean up guidelines

## Personal Hygiene

- Treat all floodwater as potentially contaminated with sewage
- It is critical to remember to practice basic hygiene during the emergency and clean up period. Wash hands thoroughly in soap and clean water, or with an alcohol gel, after handling any flood-affected items, or after participating in any flood clean up activities.
- Avoid all unnecessary contact with mud and floodwaters. Do not enter areas where there is mud, unless feet are covered. Always wear gloves when handling flood affected items or mud. Keep children out of flood affected areas.
- Avoid the use of common or unclean eating utensils, toothbrushes, towels, handkerchiefs, and remember to wash hands in soap and clean water immediately after going to the toilet and always before handling or eating food.
- All cuts and abrasions should be cleaned, treated with antiseptic and covered immediately. If you have a deep or puncture wound or if any wounds develop redness or swelling, seek immediate medical attention and ask about Tetanus status.
- Avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. Use an insect repellent on exposed skin areas and reapply every couple of hours. Cover up as much as possible with loose fitting clothing.
- Should you or any of your family have severe diarrhoea or vomiting, please seek medical assistance. If you have these symptoms, you'll need extra fluids to replace what you lose. The best fluids to take are those that contain a mixture of special salts (electrolytes) & sugars, eg. Gastrolyte, which can be purchased from local pharmacies.

## Household Safety

- Use a torch to carry out inspection inside the building.
- If power points have been exposed to floodwater, do not turn on the electricity until a qualified electrician has inspected it.
- Electrical equipment that has been water damaged should be dried and checked by a qualified electrician before use.
- Electrical hot water systems which have been under water should be inspected by an electrician. Similarly any gas appliances, gas bottles or electrical appliances affected by floodwaters should be inspected for safety before use.

## House Clean Up Steps

- Whilst cleaning up in and around houses, wear suitable protective clothing, eg. boots, gloves etc and be wary of snakes, spiders and rats that may have taken refuge in your home.
- Wash out mud, dirt and debris from your house with a hose, starting at the highest point and working down to ground level.
- Take out everything that is wet and that can be moved, eg. floor coverings, furniture, bedding, linen and clothing. A decision should be made whether to keep carpet, rugs, mats and other floor coverings. If floor coverings are removed, the floor underneath should be thoroughly clean and dry before new material is laid.
- Start drying out the house as soon as floodwaters recede. On dry days keep all doors and windows open to assist with drying. Fans may also help. Attempt to drain water away from under the house, and try to increase the airflow there to assist drying. Check for trapped water and mud in wall or floor cavities.
- All equipment or surfaces in the house that have been affected by flood waters need to be cleaned, eg. Empty refrigerators and cupboards. Hard surfaced floors, walls, benches and sinks, should be thoroughly cleaned with hot soapy water and then disinfected by wiping or spraying surfaces with a chlorine bleach solution (see below) or a product labelled as a disinfectant. Once disinfected allow to dry. Always wear gloves and protective clothing and do not touch face and eyes while using disinfectants.
- To make up a 10 litre bucket (standard size) of disinfectant add water and one of the following:
  - 25 - 50mls (1/4 cup) of 4% (strength) available chlorine (eg. household bleach) OR
  - 8 – 16mls (dessertspoon) of 12.5% (strength) available chlorine (eg. liquid pool chlorine)OR

- 1.5 – 3grams of 65% (strength) available chlorine (eg. granular pool chlorine)
- Mould or mildew may develop if items are not completely dried. Mould or mildew may be removed with household bleach, however the strength of the product may ruin some household items. A mask should be worn when working with heavy mould.
- Linen, blankets and clothing should be washed in hot water (if instructions allow) or dry cleaned.
- Flood affected mattresses are difficult to treat and may need to be discarded. Foam rubber mattresses may be thoroughly washed with a garden hose. A detergent solution should be squeezed through the mattress and then the mattress allowed to dry. Other types of mattresses or furniture such as lounge chairs are difficult to re-condition, but could be air dried in the sun then sprayed thoroughly with a disinfectant solution, or check with a commercial renovating company.

## Food, Water & Kitchen Cleanup

- Tap water may be used for drinking and food preparation if the local water supply authority has indicated that supplies are safe for consumption.
- Throw away any food that has come into contact with floodwaters. Some canned food may be salvageable. If the cans are dented or damaged throw them away.
- If power is cut for more than a couple of hours, foods in fridges will spoil. Freezers will generally not defrost and spoil for at least 24 hours if the door has been kept shut.
- The consumption of unsafe food may cause serious illness. Perishable foods (eg. dairy products, meat, poultry, prepared foods etc) should be disposed of if un-refrigerated for more than four (4) hours.
- Frozen foods if thawed, should NOT be refrozen and should be consumed within 24 hours or disposed of. If any food has been covered by floodwaters it should be discarded. If in doubt, throw it out.
- Dishes, pots and pans that have been covered by floodwater should be carefully inspected, washed and sanitise before they are used again. Discard any items made of porous material, such as wood, plastic or rubber. Any dishes with deep cracks should be thrown away as well. These items can't be adequately sanitised.
- Wash the remaining items in hot detergent solution, using a brush, if necessary, to remove dirt. Equipment that can be taken apart should be cleaned in pieces. Rinse in clean hot water.
- After washing and rinsing, sanitise items as follows:
  - Immerse glass, porcelain, china, and enamelware for 10 minutes in a disinfecting solution of 1 tablespoon of chlorine bleach per 2 litres of hot water. Air-dry dishes. Do not use a towel.
  - Disinfect silverware, metal utensils, and pots and pans by boiling in water for 10 minutes. Chlorine bleach should not be used in this case because it reacts with many metals and causes them to darken.
  - Domestic dishwashers, if available and pre-cleaned are capable of sanitising all eating and cooking utensils.
- Cupboards and counters need to be cleaned with hot soapy water and rinsed with a chlorine bleach solution before storing dishes.

## In the Yard

- Yards should be raked to remove debris. If necessary hose down yard, apply builders lime with care and wet down lime.
- Flooding of a septic system may lead to a back-up of sewage in the home, and lack of sanitation until the system is fixed. When flooding or saturated soil conditions persist, a septic system cannot function properly. Septic tanks may need to be pumped out as the soil and transpiration area may need time to dry out.
- If you suspect damage has occurred to your septic tank, have it professionally inspected and/or serviced.
- To avoid creating mosquito breeding sites, remove from your yard all water holding rubbish, empty out pot plant bases and try to encourage drainage from your yard.
- If you use a water bore or well for domestic purposes and that bore has been inundated with floodwaters, you should purge the bore for three (3) times the volume of the bore before using the water. If you have continued concerns about the quality of your bore water, please contact Council.
- Dead animals should be disposed of by burial or cremation on rural properties, or contact Council regarding other options for disposal.

## **Children's Toys**

- Children's toys affected by floodwater should be discarded if they are soft toys or moulded plastic toys with air injection holes, however, solid toys could be disinfected.

## **Farm Chemicals**

- If you have any concern about flood affected farm chemicals, contact the fire brigade.

## **Waste Disposal**

- This issue will be updated as further information and advice is available.

## **Contact Details**

- Public Health Unit Greater Western AHS Liz Stubbs 6339 5184

## **Web Details**

- Emergency NSW [www.emergency.nsw.gov.au](http://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au)

## **Acknowledgement**

- Hunter New England Population Health