



## Recovering After Hurricane Irene August 30, 2011

Now that Hurricane Irene has passed, many New Yorkers are coping with homes affected by flooding and power outages. Here is some useful information about how to keep you and your family safe.

### Drinking Water

New York City (NYC) tap water is safe to drink, including in areas with flooding, unless otherwise reported by city officials. The NYC Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene are monitoring the City's drinking water system and will provide additional guidance or warning if needed.

- If your water service was disrupted run the tap for at least 30 seconds and until the water runs cold and clear. Replace all ice machine filters and beverage dispenser filters, and flush all water lines for 5 minutes.
- Monitor [www.nyc.gov/dep](http://www.nyc.gov/dep) for any updates on NYC drinking water.

### Food Safety

Food can become contaminated and cause serious sickness or death if you have had a power outage or if your food products have come into contact with flood water.

- Throw away any food (including packaged food) that was touched by flood water. **IF IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT.**
- Inspect canned food and throw away any food in damaged cans.
- If the power in a refrigerator goes out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. The refrigerator will keep food cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will keep the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door remains closed.
- Throw away any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs or leftovers) that has been above 40°F for two hours or more.

### Flood Cleanup

Floods can cause damage to floors, walls, rugs and personal belongings. Flood waters may contain sewage, so it is important to disinfect contaminated items and to keep from coming into contact with the sewage while you clean. After a flood, it is important to clean and dry affected items as quickly as possible to prevent mold growth.

Stay away from deep water. Extensive flooding damage may require cleanup and restoration by professionals.

### **How do I protect myself from flood water containing sewage?**

Sewage contains germs that may cause stomach or intestinal infections if swallowed. Contact with sewage may also cause infections in cuts, scrapes and eyes. To prevent infection you should:

- Keep children, pets and people with compromised immune systems away until the area has been cleaned and disinfected.
- Throw away any food (including packaged food) that was touched by sewage water.
- Avoid direct contact with sewage. Be careful not to splash sewage on your face.
- Use protective eyewear and wear waterproof gloves and boots when clearing debris,

### **What is the best way to clean floors, wooden furniture and other surfaces contaminated with sewage?**

- Remove visible contamination with detergent and water.
- Disinfect by wiping surface with a bleach solution. Use a half cup of household bleach in a gallon of water. Non-bleach sanitizers can also be used.  
**Warning:** Never mix bleach with ammonia or detergents containing ammonia products, since dangerous gases may be created. Bleach may damage some materials.
- Dry surfaces thoroughly to avoid mold growth

### **How should I clean clothing, bedding, other fabrics and paper items contaminated with sewage?**

- Pre-rinse fabrics with cold water to help prevent staining.
- Launder with detergent. This will disinfect most items.
- Dry thoroughly.
- Dry clean items that cannot be laundered. This process will generally disinfect clothing.
- Throw out soaked leather shoes, as it may be very difficult to disinfect them.
- Speak to a professional trained in conservation methods about cleaning valuable papers and photographs.

### **How can sewage-contaminated rugs and carpeting be cleaned?**

- Clean small contaminated areas with detergents and disinfectants.
- Dry thoroughly and quickly.
- Hire a professional to clean larger areas.
- Throw away soaked rug padding.

### **What should I do after I finish cleaning?**

- When finished, disinfect your waterproof boots and gloves with a solution of one half cup household bleach in one gallon of water. Rinse with clear water and allow boots and gloves to dry.
- Wash your hands, body and clothing with soap and water after cleanup.

### **Where can I get more information?**

For more information, visit <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/>

## Prevent Mold

Mold can take several days to develop after flooding. Mold growth in indoor environments may cause allergic reactions in some people and may be an asthma trigger.

- Dry all affected areas quickly and thoroughly.
- Use fans to dry out your home and reduce odors.  
**Warning:** DO NOT run any electrical equipment or appliances near standing water.
- Use a dehumidifier to help dry out enclosed spaces.
- If there is extensive damage, hire a professional to clean and restore your home.

## How to Clean Mold

- If the mold problem is small (less than about 10 square feet – roughly a 3 foot by 3 foot patch), then you can normally handle the cleanup job yourself. Always use waterproof gloves and consider using safety goggles and a respirator. You may need professional help if it is a larger area of mold.
- Scrub mold off hard surfaces with soap or a detergent and water. Dry completely.
- Throw away moldy ceiling tiles, carpet and other porous material.
- Dispose of any sponges or rags used to clean mold.
- If the mold returns quickly or spreads, you may have an ongoing water/moisture problem.
- Learn more about how to prevent and clean mold and the health effects of mold by visiting <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/epi/mold.shtml>

## Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Carbon monoxide is a deadly odorless, colorless gas produced by burning fuel. It can kill you without warning.

- Never use generators, charcoal grills, camp stoves, or other gasoline or charcoal-burning devices indoors. Keep generators outdoors and away from windows, doors, or air vents.
- NEVER run a car or truck inside a garage even if you leave the door open.
- Leave your home immediately and call 911 if your carbon monoxide detector alarms.
- Seek prompt medical attention if you suspect carbon monoxide poisoning and are feeling dizzy, light-headed, or nauseated.
- For additional information on carbon monoxide see:  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/ei/eicarbon.shtml>  
<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/carbonmonoxide.asp>

## Outdoor Safety Issues

Although the hurricane has passed, outdoors activities may still pose some risk.

- DO NOT cut down trees or remove other large obstacles that may have fallen in front of your home.
- Keep away from trees and unstable buildings and structures.

- Take precautions to avoid falls, strains, cuts and bruises and get help to lift heavy items.
- Secure ladders and use on level ground.
- Avoid driving vehicles in flooded areas and be careful driving around obstructions in roadways.
- Do not wade in deep water. Electrical hazards may be present, including equipment or cables.
- 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. Do not turn the power back on until electrical equipment has been inspected by a qualified electrician.
- During power outages use flashlights or other battery-operated lights. DO NOT use candles.
- Inspect for and remove any standing water near your home to prevent mosquito conditions.
- For information on reporting damage to your home or fallen trees visit:  
<http://www.nyc.gov/apps/311/allServices.htm?requestType=topService&serviceName=Hurricane+Damage+Report>
- Report unsafe conditions to 311.

### **Additional Resources**

For more information on how to prepare for and recover from floods, storms and power outages please visit:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/pdf/recovery.pdf>

<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/pdf/returnhome.pdf>

Food and Drug Agency:

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucm076881.htm#s3>

New York State Department of Health:

<http://www.health.state.ny.us/publications/7064.pdf>

Occupational Safety and Health Administration

[http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show\\_document?p\\_table=NEWS\\_RELEASE&p\\_id=20562](http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=NEWS_RELEASE&p_id=20562)