Cleaning up a flooded home

Floodwater can contain harmful bugs that could make you and your family (whānau) sick. Assume all floodwater is contaminated with animal and human sewage, farm run-off or chemicals.

- Flood waters, silt and dust can cause diarrhoea, skin, eye and respiratory infections and illnesses like tetanus and leptospirosis (lepto).
- Drain, dry and clean-up flooded spaces as soon as it's safe to do so, to remove hazards and prevent damp and mould.
- You and your whānau may experience a range of emotions because of the flood. If you need to talk, call free or text **1737** anytime or see the *Looking after Yourself* section at the end.
- Before you start and during the clean-up process, follow this guidance to keep you and your whānau safe. If you have insurance, check your policy's requirements before you start cleaning up.

Getting prepared

- Always wash your hands with soap and water, and dry them thoroughly:
  - after handling anything contaminated with floodwater, sewage or silt.
  - before eating, preparing food, drinking, touching your mouth or face, or smoking/vaping.
- Keep children and pets away from flooded areas until clean-up is complete, to keep them safe.
- Use protective clothing: long sleeves and trousers or overalls, rubber or gardening gloves, sturdy shoes or boots and eye protection.
- Wear a properly fitted mask. P2 and N95 masks are best, but surgical masks will help.
- Check with your doctor and ensure your tetanus vaccinations are up to date.
- Cover cuts or wounds with waterproof dressings. Floodwater and sludge can contain sharp objects. Wash any injuries with clean water and soap immediately and apply a clean bandage. Check with your GP or hauora provider if the wound is deep, as you may need a tetanus booster.
- If possible, keep animals away from floodwaters.

Drying out your house

- Drain, dry and clean any flooded areas as soon as it safe to do so, to remove hazards and prevent damp and mould.
- Air out rooms each day to reduce dampness.
- Use a dehumidifier to keep the moisture levels down. Keep external doors and windows closed while it is running.

The clean-up

- First wash surfaces and objects with detergent and water.
- Then disinfect with two cups (500 ml) of bleach to 10 litres of water. Start at the top and clean toilets last. Leave disinfectant on surfaces for 10 to 30 minutes or follow the product instructions.

Kitchen utensils

- Throw out wooden items (chopping boards and spoons), plastic items, baby bottle teats and dummies, if they have touched floodwater. They can't be safely cleaned.
- Wash other utensils in clean hot soapy water and rinse. Disinfect by soaking in two cups of plain bleach in 10 litres of water for a minute. Rinse in safe water. You can boil all utensils for one minute.

Soft furnishings, clothing, blankets and curtains

- Get rid of wet items like carpets, curtains, bedding, toys and clothes, unless they can be cleaned and disinfected.
- Throw out mattresses or other large items if they have been soaked with floodwater. Foam rubber mattresses and pillows can be washed, disinfected and dried in the open air. Dry cleaners and carpet cleaners may be able to help.

Appliances (fridges, electrical goods)

- Do not use electrical products if they have been soaked in water. If you are unsure, throw them out.

Garden produce

- Do not eat garden produce (for example, fruits and vegetables) if the soil has been flooded.
- Clear any debris and sprinkle lime to stop smells and flies. Lime is sold at your garden shop. Use a fork to make drainage holes for better airflow.

Outside areas

- Sun, wind and air are the best ways to dry and disinfect outside areas.
- Remove solid materials like sanitary products, toilet paper and faecal matter (poos). Put them in a sealed bag.
- Use a garden hose and broom to wash the outside of the property. Do not use a high-pressure hose or water blaster, as they spread contaminants into the air.
- Remove contaminated clothing and footwear before going inside and wash your hands immediately.
- Clean hard surfaces like concrete with a solution of 1 litre of household bleach in 10 litres of water. Leave on for 30 minutes, then rinse.

Removing silt

- Silt may contain faecal matter (poos) and other contaminants that become airborne when dry and a health risk if breathed in.
- If you are moving silt, wear personal protective equipment (PPE) – see *Getting Prepared* above.
- Stop work if you find hazardous debris (such as cladding or cement tiles which may contain asbestos, chemical drums, or a dead animal). Contact your local council for advice.
- Move silt away to the edge of your section away from drains, and cover the pile if it might dry out. Do not put silt into your compost.
- Find out more about cleaning up after a flood and removing silt at: civildefence.govt.nz/recovery-what-to-do-after-a-flood

Mould

- If mould has developed on surfaces, clean them as soon as possible. Wear protective clothing such as gloves and a mask.
- For large areas of mould, contact a professional mould removal specialist.
- For small areas, use soap and water to clean the surface and then a commercial mould cleaner or bleach (mix 1 ½ cups of bleach in 4 litres of water). Leave for 10 minutes, then rinse and dry.

Materials that may contain asbestos

- Be cautious when assessing and working on flood damaged property. Homes, garages, sheds and marae that were built or renovated before 2000 may contain asbestos, which could be exposed by flood damage.
- Asbestos fibres are harmful when they are dry and if you breathe them in. Building materials that contain asbestos should be removed by a WorkSafe New Zealand licensed contractor.

If you get sick

- Floodwater can cause diarrhoea and vomiting, eye and skin infections and breathing problems. People who are very young, very old, or have underlying medical conditions are at higher risk. If you have diarrhoea, drink plenty of water. Diluted cordials and ice blocks are also good.
- If any wound or cut looks infected because there is redness, swelling or pus, seek medical attention or phone **Healthline** on **0800 611 116**.
- If you feel unwell, contact your doctor or call **Healthline** for free on **0800 611 116**.

Look after yourself and others

- You and your family may experience a range of emotions because of the flood, including shock, fear and anger. If you need to talk, call free or text **1737** anytime.
- Visit healthnz.govt.nz/managing-stress-in-an-emergency
- Help vulnerable people like the elderly.
- A dedicated Disability Helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to support disabled people. Call free on **0800 11 12 13** or text **8988** for help and information.

Keep listening to your radio for instructions, information and advice.

For more information

- Visit healthnz.govt.nz/protecting-health-natural-disaster

HE2949 | October 2026

This resource is available from healthed.govt.nz or the Authorised Provider in your local health district

Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora