

REENTERING YOUR HOME AFTER A FLOOD

There are several potential hazards to be aware of prior to reentering your home following a flood. These include electrical and structural hazards, exposure to chemicals and sewage in contaminated floodwater and mold growth due to building materials that have been exposed to water. Other issues include fire and explosion hazards if natural gas is present, pipe or gas leaks and the potential for trips and falls.

The following are safety tips provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for reentering your home following a flood. However, the American Industrial Hygiene Association recommends the cleanup of hazardous materials be performed or overseen by health and safety professionals with knowledge of the hazards and expertise in methods to protect you and the environment.

Initial Reentry

- If you have standing water in your home turn off the main power from a dry location, if possible. If access to the main power switch is in an area with standing water, call an electrician. Never turn power on or off or use an electric tool or appliance while standing in water.
- Have an electrician check the electrical system before turning the power on again.
- If the house has been closed for several days, enter briefly to open doors and windows to let the house air out for at least 30 minutes before you stay for any length of time.
- Assume your home has been contaminated with mold if it has been closed for several days.
- Your home also may be contaminated with sewage. Avoid contact with floodwater if you have an open wound and be sure to wash your hands after contact with floodwater.

Floodwater Safety

It is important to protect yourself from exposure to floodwater regardless of the source of contamination. The best way to protect yourself is to stay out of the water. If you must come in contact with floodwater:

- Wear rubber boots, rubber gloves and goggles.
- Wash the area with soap and clean water as soon as possible. If you don't have soap or water, use alcohol-based wipes or sanitizer.
- Take care of wounds and seek medical attention, if necessary.
- Wash clothes contaminated with flood or sewage water in hot water and detergent before reusing them.

Drying Out Your Home

- If you have electricity and an electrician has determined that it's safe to turn it on, use a "wet-dry" shop vacuum (or the vacuum function of a carpet steam cleaner), an electric-powered water transfer pump, or sump pump to remove standing water. If you are operating equipment in wet areas, be sure to wear rubber boots.
- Use a portable generator to power equipment to remove standing water if you do not have electricity or it is unsafe to turn on. If you must use a gasoline-powered pump, generator, pressure washer, or any other gasoline-powered tools to clean your home, never operate the gasoline engine inside your home, basement, garage, carport, porch, or other enclosed or partially enclosed structures, or less than 20 feet from any door, window, or vent, even if the windows and doors are open. Such improper use can create dangerously high levels of carbon monoxide and cause carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Open windows and doors of the house to aid in the drying-out process, if weather permits.
- Use fans and dehumidifiers to remove excess moisture. Fans should be placed at a window or door to blow the air outwards rather than inwards, so not to spread the mold.
- Have your home heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) system checked and cleaned by a maintenance or service professional who is experienced in mold clean-up before you turn it on. If the HVAC system was flooded with water, turning on the mold-contaminated HVAC will spread mold throughout the house.
- Prevent water outdoors from reentering your home. For example, rain water from gutters or the roof should drain away from your house and the ground around the house should slope away from your house to keep basements and crawl spaces dry.
- Ensure that crawl spaces in basements have proper drainage to limit water seepage. Ventilate to allow the area to dry out.

More Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/index.html>

American Industrial Hygiene Association: <https://www.aiha.org/publications-and-resources/TopicsofInterest/Hazards/Pages/Flood-Response-Resources.aspx>