

8 Dangers After Floods You Need To Know About

We've all heard that you shouldn't drive across flooded roads or stay when you're told to evacuate, but what about after the water recedes?

You just go back in, clean up the debris, and start living again, right?

Well, no. Flood waters are full of disease-carrying bugs, and there are other dangers after floods you need to know about, too.

1. Bacteria

Flood water is nasty. It's full of chemicals, garbage, animal waste, biohazardous waste (think about other people with bleeding wounds and open sores wading in it and often sewer and septic waste, too. It's sort of like walking through a toilet that ten thousand people have used without flushing.

Then all that nasty stuff soaks into your belongings, your ground, and the surface of everything on your property that it's touched. It's imperative that you wear rubber boots, heavy rubber gloves, and [follow other safety protocols](#) when you're walking through your property or touching anything that was in contact with flood waters.

Especially if it's warm, pathogens breed like crazy, so just because the water is gone, don't make the mistake of thinking that the yuck went with it.

2. Drinking Water

During flooding, city water is often contaminated due to

broken pipes or leaks caused by collapses, breaches, or facility flooding. This means that basically, you're drinking flood water. That's how you catch such diseases as cholera.

The same holds true for well water. Flood water seeps into the ground and can contaminate your well. It's important to test your water after flooding.

To ensure that your water is safe to drink, boil it at a rolling boil for at least 1 minute. If you're above 6000 feet in elevation, increase that time to 3 minutes. I always at least double that just to be sure. You can also use purification tablets, bleach, or [iodine](#) to kill pathogens in your water.

3. Standing Water

Standing water is a breeding ground for bacteria and disease-spreading insects such as mosquitoes. After flooding, standing water is an issue in low spots and in places such as planters and buckets. There may also be standing water left in basements or other parts of your house.

Empty all containers that you can and use a sump pump or wet vac to get as much water out of your house and buildings as possible. Even sweeping out the water is often effective, though labor-intensive.

Open windows, assuming it's not raining, and put in the corners to help floors and walls dry faster.

4. Unsafe Bridges and Structures

Flooding often causes structural damage to bridges, roads and buildings that may not be obvious to the naked eye. Don't cross closed bridges and inspect your house and buildings closely before entering. Better yet, have your property inspected by a professional.

Remember, too, that even weight-bearing walls can be damaged during flooding, so if the dry wall is damaged, assume that the inner framework may be, too.

5. Mold and Mildew

This is a HUGE issue after flooding because mold and mildew hide in places that you can't see. As a matter of fact, they thrive in dark areas. Both are ugly to look at, but more importantly, they can cause serious health issues including respiratory problems that can lead to death.

Black mold in particular can be deadly. In tropical areas where it's humid most of the year, black mold is a critical issue that can actually cause a house to be condemned because the health risk is so serious. Since flooding occurs most often in the summer, all types of mold and mildew should be a consideration when moving back into a space.

Drywall or paneling that has gotten wet should be closely inspected for mold and mildew. Bleach in a 1:5 ratio to water will kill mold and mildew but you need to make sure that you kill it all. Again, a home inspection is in order just to be sure and you really should just replace drywall and paneling that's gotten wet.

Here is an infographic from [Heiton Buckley](#) to help you make mold removal easier.



Humidity, dampness, leaks and condensation – with the right conditions, mold can grow almost anywhere.

Here's a quick run-down of how to remove mold from some common household surfaces and everyday items.

CLOTHES



- 1 PLACE 1 CUP OF VINEGAR INTO WASHING MACHINE DRAWER, ALONG WITH DETERGENT
- 2 WASH CLOTHES ON A HOT TEMPERATURE SETTING
- 3 HANG CLOTHES TO DRY IN SUNLIGHT TO FURTHER KILL MOLD SPORES

Vinegar kills 82% of mold species and is effective for common fabrics. For specialist fabrics, such as leather or silk, dry cleaning is the recommended course of action.

HATS



- 1 WORKING OUTSIDE, BRUSH AWAY LOOSE MOLD
- 2 SPRINKLE TALCUM POWDER ON STAINS AND LEAVE FOR A FEW MINUTES, AND BRUSH AWAY
- 3 TAKE A DAMP CLOTH AND WIPE OR PAT AWAY REMAINING POWDER. DO ENTIRE HAT FOR CONSISTENCY
- 5 DRY HAT IN SUNNY LOCATION

This method is suitable for felt hats or baseball caps. For delicate or vintage hats, it's always best to go to a professional cleaner.

LEATHER SHOES



- 1 WORKING OUTSIDE, REMOVE SURFACE MOLD WITH A DAMP CLOTH AND ALLOW SHOE TO DRY
- 2 CLEAN SHOE WITH MILD SOAP, OR LEATHER CLEANER. CLEAN ENTIRE SHOE FOR AN EVEN RESULT

Suede leather should be treated gently to avoid damaging the material.

GROUT



- 1 SPRAY A MIXTURE OF 1 PART VINEGAR AND 1 PART WATER ONTO AFFECTED AREA
- 2 USING A BRUSH, SCRUB GROUT IN CIRCULAR MOTIONS
- 3 MAKE A PASTE OF BAKING SODA AND WATER. SPREAD MIXTURE ALONG THE GROUT AND REPEAT SCRUBBING METHOD

Bathrooms are a common mold hotspot. Be sure to keep the room well ventilated to avoid further problems.

PAINTED WALLS



- 1 FILL BUCKET WITH DETERGENT AND WATER
- 2 DIP A RAG IN THE SOAPY WATER AND GENTLY WIPE OFF MOLD
- 3 USING A DRY RAG, WIPE EXCESS MOISTURE OFF THE WALL
- 4 VACUUM AROUND THE AREA TO REMOVE ANY REMAINING SPORES

Make sure leaky pipes behind walls aren't the cause your mold problem. If mold is growing behind walls, you will usually have to replace the plasterboard completely.

CURTAINS



- 1 WASH CURTAINS USING DETERGENT AND 1 CUP OF VINEGAR
- 2 TO TREAT STAINS, MAKE A PASTE OF LEMON AND SALT AND SPREAD OVER THE STAINED AREA
- 3 REMEMBER TO TEST THIS PASTE IN A SMALL INCONSPICUOUS AREA FIRST
- 5 LET THE PASTE SET FOR 15-30 MINUTES BEFORE RINSING CURTAINS WITH WATER

WASH CURTAINS AGAIN

This method is only suitable for cotton and linen curtains. If your curtains are dry clean only, then get them specially cleaned by professionals.

TENT



- 1 CLEAN THE TENT USING A SPONGE AND SOAPY WATER
- 2 SOAK THE TENT WITH A SOLUTION OF TECHNICAL FABRIC CLEANER AND WATER. USE A BATHTUB IF YOU DON'T HAVE A LARGE ENOUGH CONTAINER
- 3 HANG TENT IN THE SUN, AND WHEN HALF-WAY DRY, MOVE TO SHADE
- 4 TO TREAT MILDEW STAINS, SCRUB SPOTS WITH A MIXTURE OF 1 CUP OF SALT, 1 CUP OF LIME JUICE AND ABOUT 2.5 GALLONS OF WATER AND ALLOW TO DRY
- 5 REPAIR THE FABRIC REMOVING ANY PEELING WATERPROOF COATING, AND RECOAT THE AREA WITH WATERPROOF TENT SEALER

Always remember to let your tent dry thoroughly before packing it away.



If certain surfaces, such as carpets, wooden furniture or upholstery, are heavily mold infested, you might want to consider getting rid of them altogether, as it's almost impossible to remove the mold spores completely.

Remember, tackle mold as soon as you spot it. The best way to keep mold at bay is to ensure your home and items are kept well ventilated, insulated and dry.

SOURCES

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6. Electrical Lines

One of the biggest safety issues following any disaster is downed power lines. Since many powerlines are now run underground, things can get particularly tricky. NEVER, under any circumstances, approach or try to handle power lines. It may seem like a common sense thing, yet people continue to die because they don't heed that advice.

To be fair, many times downed power lines aren't immediately obvious. Think about a tree that was swept over in the woods behind your house. You fire up the chainsaw to clean it up and don't realize that there's a powerline tangled up in it until it's too late. Be extremely aware of what you're doing and what's around you.

If you've used [alternate methods to power your home during a flood](#), don't abandon it until you know for sure that the power is on and will stay on.

7. Stray Animals

After a flood, there are going to be stray animals that range from cats to even cows. Be careful when you see them and don't approach them if at all possible. Remember that though they're adorable, they've been out in the flood waters and could be carrying any number of diseases. It's best to call animal control.



8. Garden Dangers

As homesteaders and preppers, this is a huge consideration because we've invested so much time, effort, and money into our gardens. So what's safe to eat and what do you need to throw away?

This is a concern especially for people susceptible to illness because of weak or compromised immune systems such as small children, the elderly, and the sick. Because flood waters carry so many health risks, it's better to err on the side of caution no matter how healthy you are.

There isn't just one easy answer to whether or not you can eat produce from a flooded garden. It depends upon how it was flooded – was it just standing under water that built up in your yard during a heavy rain or did water rush in from other places and cover it?

How far along was your garden when it was flooded? Had the seeds just been planted? Were the plants young? Did they

already bear fruit? Are they above-ground, or root veggies?

First, if your plants were just waterlogged by clean, standing water in your yard, you likely don't have to worry about much more than washing the veggies before you eat them.

If your garden was recently planted and the ground was flooded by overflowed rivers or flood waters that cover large areas, you may still be OK. If the plants won't be ready for at least 120 days, they will be considered safe to eat in most circumstances.

Early season plants that were already bearing fruit and will be eaten within a few weeks of the flood will be OK to eat as long as the fruits remained above water and the veggies are peeled and/or cooked.

Any produce that is damaged or has cracks that could let in contamination should be discarded.



A good guideline to use to determine whether your crops are safe to eat is the National Organic Program guidelines for harvesting food from soil that was fertilized with non-composted manure. If you're using [liquid manure](#), you may already be familiar with these rules.

This is because research suggests that food that's been fertilized with non-composted manure may present more health hazards than food contaminated by flood waters.

Basically, the guide says that there should be a 90 day period between planting and harvesting produce grown in soil fertilized with manure that wasn't composted. If the edible part of the plant came into contact with the non-composted manure, there should be 120 days between contact and harvest.

If the produce is ready to harvest when it's flooded, I personally would count it as a loss and health officials agree with that sentiment. However, if the flooding happens part of the way through the growing season and you're going to starve without the food, you have the option of cooking it.

Though cooking will kill most microbial sources of illness, it won't do anything about chemical contamination. Again, in a life or death situation, produce that can be peeled should be.

Floods present many health and safety issues that must be dealt with immediately. Safety issues such as mold, pathogens, and structurally compromised buildings can't just be ignored; you have to deal with them immediately.

Because every flood is different, consult with your local health department and department of agriculture for more accurate guidelines. Remember that if you evacuated, you shouldn't go back until your area is declared safe, because there's much more to consider than whether or not the water has receded. Water has to be checked, electric lines must be

secured, and a thousand other details looked after. Be smart and be safe.

One of the best ways to get a head start on your flood cleanup is to [prepare properly for a flood](#) in advance. You can't prevent everything, but you can protect yourself and your property as much as possible. You need to be prepared to face this emergency as no one – including doctors – might be there to help you out.



CLICK HERE

to find out more on the first aid techniques that will save your life when surviving in the wilderness!

If you've experienced a flood or have anything else that you'd like to add, please do so in the comments section below.

*This article has been written by **Theresa Crouse** for [Survivopedia](#).*