What to do After the Flood
Cleaning up Your Home & Ensuring that It's Safe to Occupy

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Drinking Water/Water Supply

Listen to your local radio and television stations to see whether your drinking water was been impacted by a flood. If your water supply is unsafe to drink, a Boil Water Advisory or a similar notice will be issued by your water supplier (if you are not on an individual water or independent water source). The BC Health File, "How to Disinfect Drinking Water" will provide you with additional information.

If you are on a private domestic well or water source, you should get your water tested to ensure that it is safe to drink. The BC Health File "Should I Get My Well Water Tested" will provide you with additional information on this subject.

Sewage Disposal Systems

Septic systems can be affected by flood waters as the water table rises. You can minimize the impact by reducing the amount of water handled by your system. Should flooding of your septic field and tank area occur, there is very little that can be done. You should discontinue use of your system, and do not empty your septic tank.

For detailed information on precautions and steps that should be taken to restore your system and to ensure your health, please see the "Sewerage Systems and Flooding" Fact Sheet.

Mould & Indoor Air Quality
Flooding can saturate insulation and wallboard, carpets and furniture which create favourable environments for mould development. Some moulds can affect people's health, contributing to respiratory problems, allergies, and can irritate eyes, cause skin infections and rashes. Action to remove saturated items from the home and dry the home out should be taken early after flooding to reduce the opportunity for mould growth

General information on health considerations of flood clean-up can be found in the following Health File entitled, "Clean-up Following a Flood". Information on indoor air quality and mould can be found on the "Indoor Air Quality: Mould and Other Biological Contaminants" Health File.

For more information on what you need to do to your home after a flood, please refer to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation's (CMHC) website, "After the Flood, a Homeowner's Checklist" and "Cleaning Up Your House After A Flood".

Safety Precautions

There may be a great deal of debris around or in your home following a flood. Check around your house to ensure that it is safe to manoeuvre about. See the Emergency Management BC document on "Clean-up After a Flood-General Information" for safety precautions and other information to consider after a flood.

Food Safety

When returning to your home after a flood you may need to evaluate the safety of food that was in your home.

If electricity has been off, the foods you keep in the *refrigerator and freezer* may become unsafe to eat even if they have not been contaminated by floodwater.

Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed to maintain the temperature inside.
Note the time of power outage to determine the length of time that foods have been un-refrigerated. Without power, the refrigerator section will keep foods cool for 4-6 hours - if the door is kept closed, an upright or chest freezer that is completely full will keep food frozen for about two days. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen for one day. Avoid opening and closing the freezer unnecessarily.

Throw out perishable foods such as meat, fish, poultry, eggs and leftovers that have been at temperatures above 4°C for more than two hours.

Partial thawing and refreezing may reduce the quality of some food, but the food will remain safe to eat. Foods that have thawed in the freezer may be re-frozen if they still contain ice crystals or are at 4°C or below.

Discard food that has been contaminated or spoiled due to water damage. You should also discard boxed foods, fresh vegetables and fruit, bottled drinks and home preserves, as well as medicines, cosmetics and toiletries if there is water damage.

When disposing of food, do so in a manner that will not encourage or attract pests.

All dishes and utensils should be washed with warm soapy water, and then sanitized in boiling water or a diluted bleach solution of approximately one part bleach to 10 parts water.

Some sealed or canned food may be salvageable, but should also be washed and sanitized to ensure that when opened, the food won't get contaminated.

More information on precautions that should be taken regarding food that has come into contact with floodwaters, please visit the following Health File entitled "Clean-up Following a Flood".

Electrical Safety

CAUTION: All electrical wiring in buildings that has been partially or fully covered by flood water must be checked by a qualified electrician or electrical inspector before being put into service again. Any loose wires should be considered "live" and a definite hazard.

If you there are no flood waters in your home you can probably safely use your power provided power is available in your area.

To be certain of safety and for more information on how to deal with power outages and safety, please visit the BC Hydro "Home Outage Preparation".

Natural Gas Safety

If water levels were high enough to cover the gas meter, call FortisBC or local gas provider to check your meter and regulator before using your gas system. Flood waters may have shifted your home or caused other stresses to the gas piping.

CAUTION: If you smell gas, or if there is evidence of a gas leak, don't enter the building. Turn your gas off at the main shut-off valve on the inlet pipe next to your gas meter. Using a wrench or other suitable tool, give the valve a quarter turn in either direction so that it is crosswise to the pipe. Call the 24-hour emergency line at **1-800-663-9911**, your local fire department or 911.

For more information on natural gas safety, visit the FortisBC website.

Vermin, Pests and Dead Animals

During a flood, wild animals and vermin may become flooded out of their homes and will be searching for new places to live. Steps can be taken to reduce the chance that their next home will be your home. See the BC Health File "Getting Rid of Rodents (Rats and Mice)".

You should avoid making direct contact with live wild animals as they might be carriers of disease. If you must handle dead animals, standard health and safety practices should be followed:

• Wear vinyl, PVC, nitrile, rubber or latex gloves; cut-resistant gloves can be worn underneath.
• Avoid punctures or cuts from bills, claws, or instruments used during handling of dead animals
• Double bag the specimen in bags made of thick plastic to resist puncture by beaks, talons, claws, nails, etc.
• Wash gloved hands and then bare hands well with soap and running water (this is an added precautionary measure)
• Dispose in household waste or call a licensed pest control company to assist you.
Mosquitoes are a nuisance and some are capable of carrying disease. After flood water begins to recede, take steps to reduce standing water on your property that could become mosquito breeding grounds.

For more information on what you can do to reduce mosquito breeding sites, please see the HealthLink BC File "West Nile Virus".

If Mosquitoes and other insects have become a nuisance, consider using mosquito repellents such as DEET. For more information, see the HealthLink BC File "Insect Repellents and DEET".

Contacts and Further Information

• Drinking Water Concerns – Contact the Drinking Water Officer contact in your area
• Onsite Sewage Concerns – Contact the local Health authority's Environmental Health Office
• Disaster Preparedness and Recovery – Visit the Emergency Management BC website
• Livestock and Poultry - see "Agriculture Sector Emergency Preparedness Tips"