

# Hurricane Fact Sheet

## Important Precautions During and After a Hurricane

### Avoid Dangerous Areas

- If waters continue to rise, evacuate the area immediately.
- Do not walk in, play in or drive through flooded areas. Flood water contains hidden hazards and may be deeper and faster-moving than it appears. Wear shoes at all times.
- Stay away from downed power lines.
- If you get a cut or puncture wound, get a tetanus booster shot if you have not had one in the past 5 years.

### Drinking Water

- Public and private wells that have been flooded or have lost electricity may have become contaminated. Water must be treated before use (see below). Contact your health department about well water testing.
- Use only bottled water for drinking and cooking, if available.
- Tap water used for drinking, cooking, brushing teeth or making ice must be boiled for at least five minutes before use.
- Pregnant women and children should use bottled water instead of tap water or boiled water. Baby formula should be made with bottled water. Boiled water is not good for babies and pregnant women. However, if bottled water is not available, do not use untreated water--use boiled water until bottled water becomes available.
- If you cannot boil your tap water, it can be treated with liquid chlorine bleach, using 8 drops (1/4 teaspoon) to one gallon of tap water. (WARNING! Do not use bleach that is scented or contains soap.) Mix thoroughly and let stand for 30 minutes before using.
- Do not use floodwaters for any use.

### Food and Medicines

- Any foods (including those in cans, plastic or glass), medicines and cosmetics that have come in contact with floodwaters should not be eaten. Throw them away.
- Food in the refrigerator should be thrown away if the power has been off for more than 4 hours or if food is warmer than 41 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Frozen food should be thrown away if it has thawed. Do not re-freeze thawed food.
- Medicines and cosmetics that have been in flood waters should be thrown away.



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## **Septic tanks**

- If your septic tank has been flooded, do not use the plumbing system while the septic tank is still under water.
- Do not use your plumbing system if sewage water has backed up into your home.
- Try to reduce the amount of debris that enters the septic tank or drains.
- Avoid contact with sewage from a septic tank that is not operating.
- For information on repairing or constructing a septic tank system, contact your local health department.

## **Insects and other animals**

- Bees, wasps, fire ants, snakes and other animals have lost their homes and may be very dangerous. Avoid contact with these animals as much as possible. Be cautious in moving items where animals could be hiding.
- Standing waters are breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Use insect repellent, long sleeves, pants, socks and shoes, if possible. Empty standing water from containers inside and outside the home.
- Avoid touching dead animals.

## **Cleaning up your home**

Take extra precautions to protect your health and safety. If your home was flooded during the hurricane, assume that everything touched by flood water is contaminated and will have to be disinfected or thrown out. Most clean up can be done with household cleaning products.

**Remember to wash your hands frequently during clean up and always wear rubber gloves, a disposable dust/mist face mask (NIOSH approved N-95 type) and, if possible, waterproof boots.** If your ceiling was damaged, wear a hard hat and safety glasses.

### **If your home has been flooded, you should:**

- Before turning the power back on, have your home's electrical system checked out by an electrician.
- If the pilot light on your natural gas furnace, hot-water heater or stove has gone out, have it re-lit by a professional.
- Throw away flood-contaminated mattresses, upholstered furniture, carpets and padding, wallboard and wallpaper because they can not be cleaned all the way through.
- Clean plaster or tile walls, hard-surface floors and other household surfaces by scrubbing with soap and water and disinfect them with a solution of one cup of bleach to four gallons of water. Pay particular attention to areas that come in contact with food, or where small children play. After cleaning a room or item, go over it again with disinfectant to kill germs and odors left by flood waters. Dry everything completely after cleaning.
- Use a two-bucket method when cleaning. Put cleaning solution in one bucket and rinse water in the other. Replace rinse water frequently.



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- Wash all linens and clothing in hot water with a disinfectant, or dry clean them. Throw them away if they are moldy or mildewed.
- Materials should be completely dry before cleaning, or mold and mildew will grow. If items cannot be completely dried out, throw them away.
- If materials become moldy or smell musty, they are probably contaminated and should be thrown away.
- Remove mildew on hard surfaces with household mildew cleaner; a mixture of five tablespoons washing soda or trisodium phosphate to a gallon of water; or 1/4 cup of laundry bleach to a gallon of water.
- If sewage backed up into your home, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Remove and discard contaminated household goods such as wall coverings, rugs, upholstered furniture, cloth and drywall that can't be disinfected.
- Avoid touching dead animals. Use gloves or a shovel to move dead animals, and then wash hands thoroughly. Contact your local health department about proper disposal of dead animals.
- Empty standing water out of birdbaths, tires, flower pots and other containers.

For more information on cleaning up after a flood, contact your local Emergency Management Office, county health department or Red Cross chapter. You can also get information from the following internet sites: <http://www.redcross.org> or <http://www.fema.gov>. and <http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us>

