

Cleaning up after a flood



It is important to clean and dry your house and everything in it. Floodwater may contain sewage and other hazardous materials which can contaminate your where/home.

Take photos and videos of the damage and anything that needs to be thrown away before starting the clean-up, for insurance purposes. If you have insurance, contact your insurer to lodge a claim and understand how they can help.

Always work safely when cleaning up after a flood:

- Protect yourself by wearing appropriate clothing that prevents as much direct contact on skin and feet from flood affected material.
- Cover any open cuts, scratches, grazes and wounds with waterproof plasters or dressings.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly after each clean-up session and before handling food.

Wet furniture and surfaces get mouldy after a couple of days, making the air in your where/home unhealthy. Mould may make some people with asthma, allergies, or other breathing problems sick. If there is a large amount of mould, you may want to hire professional help to clean up the mould.

Make your where/home safe and sanitary, but don't do non-essential repairs.

Examples of urgent work to your home may be:

- turning off power if there are exposed wires
- boarding up a broken window
- restoring essential services, such as toilets and running water
- replacing a damaged heat source
- turning off the water or gas if it is leaking - If your gas meter has been affected by water or debris, contact your gas supplier.
- covering any holes in the roof or walls
- making a damaged chimney safe.

Keep children and animals away from previously flooded areas until they have been cleaned and made safe.



Cleaning up inside

- Clean up, drain, and dry inside as quickly as possible. Take out everything that is wet and that can be moved – floor coverings, furniture, bedding, clothing, etc., and put them outside to dry.
- Check for trapped water and mud in wall cavities, as well as under shower trays, baths, benches and bottom shelves. You may have to chisel out some bricks at the bottom of brick veneer walls.
- Open all doors and windows, and if possible, use heaters (e.g., hot air blowers for under-floor space). Do not use outdoor gas appliances, such as patio heaters, indoors.
- Do not light fires in brick fireplaces for at least 2 weeks, and then use only small fires until the firebricks have dried out.
- Consult an engineer if there are signs that the house has moved on its foundations. Signs can include buckled floors, new cracks in walls, or out-of-shape door frames.
- Remove skirting, if necessary, and cut out softened plaster board in damaged areas. Consult an expert such as an insurance assessor or builder.
- Replace wall linings and floor coverings **only** after the building is completely dry.
- Leave redecorating for at least 3 months after finishing the repairs, to prevent risk of mould, blistering, and peeling.

They may undertake some of these steps for you as part of your claim.



In the Kitchen

Discard wooden items such as chopping boards and spoons, plastic utensils, and baby bottle teats and dummies, if they have come into contact with floodwater. There is no way to safely clean them.

Clean any other cooking, eating and kitchen utensils that have come into contact with floodwater:

- Wash in hot soapy water.
- Rinse thoroughly in safe water, then disinfect by immersing for 1 minute in a solution of 500 ml (about 2 cups) of plain, unperfumed, household bleach in 10 litres of water. Rinse again.
- Alternatively, boil all utensils for 1 minute and let cool.



In bedrooms and living rooms

You will need to throw away mattresses and other large items that have been soaked with floodwater. Get rid of contaminated clothing, carpets, upholstered furniture, toys and bedding, unless they can be cleaned and disinfected.

Foam rubber mattress or pillows may be able to be washed, disinfected and dried in the open air.



Cleaning up outside

First clear the access to the building – the rest of the section can come later. It's easier to clean up outside once the outside has dried naturally, too.

Use a shovel to remove surface contamination. Place it at the edge of your section, ensuring it doesn't block drainage channels. If you need assistance with disposing of flood debris, check with your local council to see if they have arrangements for flood debris disposal.

The best way to make your outside areas safer is to rely on natural processes such as sunlight, drying and wind. Leave garden surfaces and lawns exposed to the air and sunshine to dry out naturally. Make drainage holes with a fork to aerate.

If the outside area is heavily contaminated with sewage, use garden lime to disinfect the area. Garden lime can be bought from a garden shop. Follow the instructions on the label.

Hard surfaces, such as driveways, can be cleaned and disinfected with 1 litre of household chlorine bleach in 10 litres of cold water (a household bucket). Leave the disinfectant on for 30 minutes, then rinse with clean water.

Call 111 if you or someone you know is in life threatening danger, seriously unwell or need emergency care

For more information, visit: www.nrc.govt.nz/cyclonesupport