

## Preventing Illness after a Disaster

- **Protect Yourself from Animal- and Insect-Related Hazards**

- Avoid wild or stray animals and biting or stinging insects.
- Call local authorities to handle animals.
- Get rid of dead animals, according to local guidelines, as soon as you can.
- For more information, contact your local animal shelter or services, a veterinarian, or the Humane Society for advice on dealing with pets or stray or wild animals after an emergency.

For information on specific animal and insect issues, see [“Protect Yourself from Animal- and Insect-Related Hazards After a Natural Disaster.”](#)

- **Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning**

- Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death if you breathe it.
- Never use generators, pressure washers, grills, camp stoves or other gasoline, propane, natural gas or charcoal-burning devices inside your home, basement, garage, or camper—or even outside near an open window, door or vent.
- Don't heat your house with a gas oven.
- If you are too hot or too cold, or you need to prepare food, don't put yourself and your family at risk of CO poisoning—look to friends, family or a community shelter for help.
- If your CO detector sounds, leave your home immediately and call 911.
- Seek prompt medical attention if you suspect CO poisoning and are feeling dizzy, light-headed, or nauseated.

For further guidance on avoiding CO poisoning, see [“Protect Yourself from Carbon Monoxide Poisoning After an Emergency.”](#)

- **Clean Up Safely After Floods**

- To prevent illness, disinfect and dry buildings and items in them. This will prevent growth of some bacteria, viruses, mold and mildew that can cause illness.

For more information, see "[Clean Up Safely After a Natural Disaster](#)."

- **Keep Food and Drinking Water Safe**

- Food may not be safe to eat during and after an emergency. Water may not be safe for cooking. Water may not be safe to drink, clean with or bathe in after an emergency, such as a hurricane or flood. During and after a disaster, water can become contaminated with microorganisms (for example, bacteria), sewage, agricultural or industrial waste, chemicals and other substances that can cause illness or death.
- Listen to and follow public announcements. Local authorities will tell you if water is safe to drink or to use for cooking or bathing. Follow local instructions to use bottled water or to boil or disinfect water for cooking, cleaning or bathing.

For more information, see "[Keep Food and Water Safe after a Natural Disaster or Power Outage](#)."

- **Wash Your Hands**

- Always wash your hands with soap and boiled or disinfected water before preparing or eating food, after toilet use, after participating in cleanup activities and after handling articles contaminated with floodwater or sewage.
- Wash children's hands frequently (always before meals).
- Disinfect water for washing by mixing 1/8 teaspoon of household bleach per 1 gallon of water. Let it stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy, use a solution of 1/4 teaspoon of household bleach per 1 gallon of water.
- If water isn't available, use alcohol-based products made for washing hands.

For more tips on washing your hands, see "[Hand Hygiene After a Disaster](#)."

- **Infectious Disease**

- Short bouts of diarrhea and upset stomach and colds or other breathing diseases sometimes occur in developed countries, such as the United States, after a natural disaster, particularly among large groups of people in a shelter.
- Basic hygiene measures like frequent hand washing or use of an alcohol hand gel, especially after using the restroom or changing diapers and before eating, can help prevent these diseases.
- Diseases like cholera or typhoid are rare in developed countries and do not typically occur after a natural disaster.

For information on infectious disease, see “[After a Hurricane: Key Facts About Infectious Disease.](#)”

- **Protect Mental Health**

- The days and weeks after an emergency are going to be rough. Some sleeplessness, anxiety, anger, hyperactivity, mild depression or lethargy are normal and may go away with time. If you feel any of these symptoms acutely, seek counseling. Your state and local health departments will help you find local resources, including hospitals or health care providers that you may need.
- Seek medical care if you are injured, feel sick or have acute stress and anxiety.
- Keep as many elements of your normal routine incorporated into the disaster plans as possible, including activities to calm children's fears.
- Be aware that you may have fewer resources to attend to your day-to-day conflicts, so it is best to resolve what you can ahead of time.
- Turn to family, friends and important social or religious contacts to set up support networks to deal with the potential stressors.
- Let your child know that it is okay to feel upset when something bad or scary happens. Encourage your child to express feelings and thoughts, without making judgments.

For additional resources, see “[Disaster Mental Health Resources.](#)”

- **Avoid Mosquitoes**

- Rain and flooding in a hurricane area may lead to an increase in mosquitoes, which can carry diseases like [West Nile Virus](#). In most cases, the mosquitoes will be pests but will not carry communicable diseases.
- To protect yourself from mosquitoes, use screens on dwellings, and wear long pants, socks and long-sleeved shirts and use insect repellents that contain DEET or Picaridin. Care must be taken when using DEET on small children.
- To control mosquito populations, drain all standing water left in open containers, such as flower pots, tires, pet dishes or buckets outside your home.

- **Prevent Illness from Sewage**

- If there is flooding along with a hurricane, the waters may contain fecal material from overflowing sewage systems and agricultural and industrial waste. Although skin contact with floodwater does not, by itself, pose a serious health risk, there is risk of disease from eating or drinking anything contaminated with floodwater.

- If there has been a backflow of sewage into your house, wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Remove and discard contaminated household materials that cannot be disinfected, such as wall coverings, cloth, rugs and drywall.
  - If you have any open cuts or sores that will be exposed to floodwater, keep them as clean as possible by washing them with soap and applying an antibiotic ointment to discourage infection.
  - Wash clothes contaminated with flood or sewage water in hot water and detergent and separately from uncontaminated clothes and linens.
  - Do not allow children to play in floodwater areas and do not allow children to play with floodwater-contaminated toys that have not been disinfected.
    - Disinfect toys by using a solution of one cup of bleach in five gallons of water.
- **Prevent Temperature-Related Illness**
    - When standing or working in water that is cooler than 75 °F (24°C):
      - Wear rubber boots.
      - Ensure that clothing and boots have adequate insulation.
      - Take frequent breaks out of the water.
      - Change into dry clothing when possible.
    - Prevent heat-related illness:
      - Stay in air-conditioned buildings.
      - Take breaks in shaded areas or in cool rooms.
      - Drink water and nonalcoholic fluids often.
      - Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.

For additional information, visit [www.health.pa.gov](http://www.health.pa.gov) or [www.emergency.cdc.gov](http://www.emergency.cdc.gov).