

## Quick Tips for Cleaning Up After a Flood

Families returning to their flooded homes should be cautious before and during the cleanup process. In addition to other hazards, floodwater may contain sewage and biological contaminants that can linger in the home after the initial cleanup. Protect yourself and your family by following these steps:

1. Keep children, sick family members and pets out of the flood-affected area until cleanup is completed. Before entering the home, make sure you are up-to-date with your immunizations such as tetanus.
2. Before beginning any cleanup, make sure you have the proper personal protection. You should wear rubber boots, rubber gloves and goggles during cleanup of the home. Make sure you wear a mask with an N-95 (not oil resistant, but filters at least 95 percent of airborne particles) or P-100 label (oil proof and filters at least 99.97 percent of airborne particles). If you can afford one, a half-facepiece respirator with removable cartridges is preferred instead of a mask.
3. Some badly soaked upholstered furniture that has been submerged may be impossible to salvage. If the piece of furniture seems worth the effort to save, see pages 5, 16 and 17 of MU Extension publication MP904, *Resources for Your Flooded Home*, for directions on cleaning. Mattresses can be sent to a commercial renovating company for cleaning and disinfecting; however, it could cost less to buy a good reconditioned or new mattress. Other items such as cosmetics, stuffed animals, baby toys, pillows, foam-rubber items, books, wall coverings and most paper products should be removed and discarded. For pillows and stuffed animals that have not been badly soaked, follow cleaning and disinfecting directions on pages 5 and 6 of MP904.
4. Remove and discard drywall and insulation that has been submerged and contaminated with sewage, floodwaters or mold.
5. Thoroughly clean all hard surfaces (such as flooring, concrete, molding, wood and metal furniture, countertops, appliances, sinks and other plumbing fixtures) with hot water and laundry or dish detergent. Allow these surfaces to dry thoroughly before disinfecting. You can speed up the drying process by using fans and dehumidifiers.
6. After the initial cleaning and drying, it is important to disinfect these items and surfaces using water and bleach. Follow the instructions on the bleach container label and avoid using more than 1 cup of bleach per gallon of water. **Never mix bleach with other cleaning solutions.** After disinfecting, the surfaces should be thoroughly dried again.
7. Before installing new drywall and insulation, make sure the walls are dried to 15 percent moisture or less. To measure the moisture content of walls, use a moisture meter (not a humidity gauge). A moisture meter measures the moisture inside the material, not just the surrounding air. You can buy these meters, or borrow one from most local MU Extension centers.
8. Wash clothes that were contaminated with flood or sewage water in hot water and detergent. Use a laundromat for washing large quantities of clothes and linens until your on-site wastewater system has been professionally inspected and serviced.
9. After completing the cleanup, wash your hands with soap and warm water. If you become ill at any time during cleanup, seek immediate medical attention.

You can find more information for cleaning flood-damaged homes in MU Extension's free guide, MP904, *Resources for Your Flooded Home*. This publication offers information about electrical systems, repairing walls, cleaning furniture, flooring and floor coverings, bedding, kitchen items and controlling mold and mildew. Other information includes financial advice, filing insurance claims, avoiding fraud and hiring a contractor.

---

Written by  
**Michael E. Goldschmidt**, MU Extension State Housing and  
Environmental Design Specialist  
**Frank Wideman**, MU Extension Natural Resources Engineer

#### ALSO FROM MU EXTENSION PUBLICATIONS

MP904 Resources for Your Flooded Home  
EMW1001 Statewide Disaster Response/Recovery Contact List  
EMW1011 Family Disaster Plan  
EMW1012 Disaster Supplies Kit  
EMW1022 Financial Recovery and Risk Management  
AGW1011 Controlling Snakes After a Storm or Flood  
AGW1012 Controlling Rodents After a Flood  
AGW1013 Checking and Disinfecting Flooded Wells  
G6722 Caring for Flooded Lawns  
WQ102 Bacteria in Drinking Water

**[extension.missouri.edu](http://extension.missouri.edu) | 1.800.292.0969**