

## **PRECAUTIONS AFTER FLOODING**

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### **Septic Systems**

During heavy rains and floods, the ground can become saturated, preventing proper operation of the system. For example, a septic tank can collapse or float out of position. Signs that a septic system is not working properly include sinks and toilets that drain slowly, floor drains that overflow, and visible sewage outside the home.

If this occurs:

- Limit water usage when possible.
- Consider staggering periods of prolonged water usage such as bathing and laundering, when possible.
- Consider laundering at commercial establishments, as this will significantly reduce the demand on your own system.
- Inspect disposal areas for depressions where rainwater ponding may occur. Adding soil to these depressions will aid in surface drainage.
- Inspect roof drainage and gutters to ensure that rainwater run-off is diverted away from the disposal area.
- Consider having your septic tank pumped out. This may provide temporary relief and may help with maintenance for long-term system performance. ADPH recommends having your septic tank pumped out every three to five years to eliminate sludge build-up.
- After weather conditions improve, the system should return to normal functioning. If you continue to experience problems with your system, contact your local health department environmentalist for assistance.

### **Mold**

After natural disasters such as storms and floods, excess moisture and standing water contribute to the growth of mold in homes and other buildings. When returning to a home that has been flooded, be aware that mold may be present and may be a health risk for your family.

Most molds do not cause infections, but some molds are a health risk to people with breathing problems such as asthma or allergies, or immune problems such as HIV infection, cancer patients taking chemotherapy and people who have received organ transplants.

To protect against health risks associated with mold:

- Remove standing water from your home, office or business.
- Remove wet materials such as carpets, pads, insulation, wallboard, pillows and mattresses. If mold growth has already occurred, carefully remove the moldy material.
- Use personal protective equipment when cleaning or removing mold. These are gloves, goggles and an N-95 particle respirator (found at most hardware stores). This type of respirator may resemble a paper dust mask with a nozzle on the front. Other respirators are made primarily of plastic or rubber and have a removable cartridge that traps most of the mold spores from entering.
- Do not use a respirator if you have heart disease or chronic lung disease such as asthma or emphysema. While cleaning up, take breaks in a well-ventilated area. Individuals with known mold allergies or asthma should not clean or remove moldy materials.
- Do not mix bleach with anything except water. Mixing bleach with other liquids could produce hazardous gases from a chemical reaction. Read and follow label instructions carefully. Open windows and doors to provide plenty of fresh air.

For more information, consult the following:

[cdc.gov/disasters/mold/](https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/)

[epa.gov/mold/mold-cleanup-your-home](https://www.epa.gov/mold/mold-cleanup-your-home)

[alabamapublichealth.gov/iaq/mold.html](https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/iaq/mold.html)