



Returning home after a flood

TN: There are two logos at the top of the page. On the left is: Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa New Zealand Government. On the right is: Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand.

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Returning home after a flood

Flood water can contain lots of nasty bugs that could make you and your family sick. Before you start the clean-up process, it's important to follow these steps to keep you and your family safe.

Preparing to return home

1. Returning home after a significant flood event can be a very emotional and distressing time as your home may not look the same.

Try to prepare yourselves and your loved ones for this. If you need support, please contact one of the helplines or local support networks.

2. Floodwaters may continue to threaten your property. Only return home after council staff have inspected your home for safety and given you permission to return.
 - **Do not** use your power/gas until your supplier has checked and informed you that it is safe to use.
 - If possible, keep children and animals away from flooded areas.
 - Before you start cleaning up, take photos of your home and the damage caused as evidence to give your insurance company.

The clean-up

- Cover any cuts or wounds before you start cleaning up to help protect you from bugs.
- Dust, silt, mud and soil in the air can harm your health by getting into your lungs and airways. Coughing, lots of mucus and shortness of breath are all signs to watch out for.
- Properly fitting masks are the best protection, like P2 and N95 masks. However, even surgical masks will still help. Make sure masks fit correctly.
- Be aware that muddy floodwaters/sludge can contain sharp objects like nails and broken glass. If you get

injured, treat cuts and puncture wounds immediately to help prevent infection. Wash cuts and puncture wounds with clean water then apply a clean bandage. If your wound becomes infected or if you are not up-to-date with your tetanus vaccinations call your GP or Healthline on 0800 611 116.

- Anyone coming into contact with silt should wash and dry their hands or use hand sanitiser.
- If possible, wear cleaning gloves, sturdy closed toe footwear to prevent injuries, and protective clothing.
- Use ordinary cleaning products and follow standard instructions. Do not mix products.
- If you are drying your property naturally, keep doors and windows open as much as possible. If using dehumidifiers, close external doors and windows.

Dry the house out to prevent mould

1. Remove all sources of pooled water and excessive moisture from the home.
2. Remove all wet or flood-damaged items, including wallpaper, plasterboard, carpet, rugs, bedding, mattresses, furniture, stuffed toys, clothing, and other materials that cannot be properly dried or cleaned.
3. Remove wet wall lining (plasterboard) to allow for proper drying out of internal wall spaces. Where necessary take precautions for handling asbestos containing debris.

4. Remove all soft or absorbent materials with mould growth.
5. Temporarily store damaged or discarded items outside the home, in a safe, clean, dry place such as a shed or garage, and photograph anything that is thrown away, until your insurance claim is processed.
6. Clean and disinfect all surfaces inside the house (see below for details)
7. Allow the house to dry throughout.

Cleaning hard surfaces (floors, walls, tables, and benches)

Scrub first with clean water and dishwashing liquid to remove all visible dirt. Then wipe down with a household disinfectant, for example 2 cups of bleach to 10 litres of water.

Cleaning kitchen utensils

Wash cooking, eating, and any other kitchen utensils in clean hot soapy water.

Rinse thoroughly then disinfect by immersing for 1 minute in a solution of 500 ml (about two cups) of plain, unperfumed household bleach in 10 litres of water.

Rinse again in safe water. Alternatively, boil all utensils for one minute and let cool.

Cleaning soft furnishings, clothing, blankets, and curtains

Thoroughly wash and disinfect all items and dry in the sunshine.

Get rid of items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected such as mattresses that have been soaked in flood waters.

Remember: you could also contact local dry cleaners and carpet cleaners to assist.

Appliances (fridges, freezers, and electrical goods)

Do not use electrical products if they have been soaked in water. If unsure, throw them out.

Garden produce

Do not eat garden produce if the soil has been flooded.

Clean-up any debris and sprinkle with garden lime to stop smells and flies. Purchase lime from your local garden shop and follow the label instructions, especially warnings and cautions.

Outside areas

Remove human waste solid materials (sanitary products, toilet paper, and faecal matter) and place in sealed bags.

A garden hose is useful for washing down the outside of the property to remove silt, salt deposits and fine debris but do not use high-pressure hoses as they can blast contaminated matter into the air.

Use garden lime to help disinfect the ground and follow the label instructions.

For more information go to www.healthnavigator.org.nz or if you are worried about your health, call Healthline 0800 611 116.

End of Returning Home after a Flood