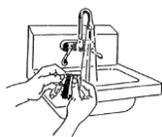


# Health and Safety Tips for Flood Volunteers

Helping people after a flood is a Minnesota tradition. Because cleanup work can be hazardous, these guidelines on handwashing, basic safety precautions, and immunizations can help protect the health and safety of volunteers.

## Handwashing

Simple, basic hygiene – handwashing – is the single most important thing you can do to protect your health when you cleanup after a disaster.



- After going to the toilet, before you eat or drink, or touch your hands to your face.

**WASH YOUR HANDS THOROUGHLY AND DO IT OFTEN!**

## What if there is no running water?

- Transport and store clean water in clean plastic containers.
- Get a beverage cooler equipped with a spigot – and keep it filled with clean water for handwashing.

## The Right Way to Wash Hands

1. Wet hands with clean water.
2. Put soap on hands and wrists.
3. Keep fingers pointing down.
4. Rub soapy hands together for 20 seconds.
5. Wash all sides of hands, fingers, wrists, and thumbs.
6. Use a nailbrush to clean under fingernails and rinse well.
7. Dry with a clean paper towel.
8. Turn off faucet with a paper towel.
9. Open bathroom door with a paper towel to avoid touching the door handle.

## What if the water is contaminated?

If the water might not be safe, add one tablespoon of bleach to one gallon of water before you wash your hands with it.

## Floodwater and your health

Always assume that disease-causing germs may be present in floodwater or backed up sewage. Common sense, and basic hygiene, can help you keep the risk low.

Skin contact with floodwater, by itself, does not pose a health threat unless you have an open wound. The fecal material in sewage can cause disease, but it does not pose any risk unless it enters the mouth. To keep risks low:

## Be sure to wash your hands:

- After you touch any surfaces or objects that may have been in contact with debris or other contaminated material.

- Wash your hands thoroughly after working in a contaminated area.
- Wear rubber gloves and boots to protect your hands and feet.
- Take a shower after working in a contaminated area.
- Assume that anything touched by floodwater is contaminated.

## Basic safety precautions

For safety, always work with a buddy, especially when doing potentially hazardous work. You can keep track of each other, and make sure you are where you are supposed to be at the expected time.

## Protective equipment

When you must work in a building that has been evacuated or flooded, you may need items like a hard hat, safety glasses, and steel toe or steel shank boots. Wear rubber boots if pooled water is still present in your work area.

Use vinyl or latex gloves to handle items that may have been in contact with floodwater.

To avoid possible allergic reactions, wear a surgical mask or respirator if you suspect a potential mold problem. Use a mask that carries the N-95 designation from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Mold can grow on surfaces inside previously flooded buildings, or on unpreserved food or grain

## Personal decontamination

After completing your work, scrub down potentially contaminated equipment using clean water and a disinfecting detergent. For example, you should try to clean mud or debris off your boots before entering clean buildings or vehicles.

## Confined spaces

Decomposing plant matter or sewage can use up oxygen and generate hazardous gasses or contaminants like carbon monoxide, hydrogen sulfide and methane. In a confined, unventilated space, the result can be a potentially fatal breathing hazard. Check with an expert before working in spaces like silos, well pits, storm shelters, or small, unventilated basements.

## Electrical hazards

Use proper ventilation when running gas or diesel generators, to prevent carbon monoxide buildup or other breathing hazards. Make sure the main building circuits are off, so you won't accidentally feed electricity back into the power supply lines, potentially injuring other workers. Use extreme caution in dealing with downed lines or other electrical equipment, even if the power is currently off.

## Heat stress and fatigue

As the weather warms up, the exertion of cleanup work can lead to problems like fainting, heat cramps, heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Be aware of the symptoms of heat exhaustion and heat stroke, and take steps to prevent heat stress.

Drink a glass of water or some other decaffeinated beverage every 15-20 minutes while you are on the job, and wear loose, light-colored clothing. Prevent fatigue by maintaining a realistic work schedule. Tired people tend to have more accidents.

## First aid for cuts and scrapes

Wash cuts or scrapes as soon as possible, using clean water and soap. Cover the injury with bandages or clean gauze, and avoid contact with potentially contaminated items.

Seek medical attention if the injury becomes red, hot or swollen.

## Hazardous materials

Read labels and observe appropriate safety precautions when using potentially hazardous chemical products. Keep these products away from children. Local emergency officials can give you the number of the nearest poison control center.

## Lifting large objects

To avoid potential back problems, be sure to:

- Size up an object before you lift it. If it seems too heavy or awkward to lift, get help or use a mechanical lifting device. If you do try to lift it, make sure you can handle the weight.
- Bend your knees. Lift large objects with your legs, not your back. Center yourself over the load, bend your knees and get a good handhold. Lift straight up, using a smooth motion.
- Make sure you can get where you are going. Before you start out, make sure you are capable of carrying the object where it needs to go. Make sure that your path is free of obstacles, spills or slick spots.
- Keep your body straight. When carrying a heavy object, hold it directly in front of you and keep it close to your body. Avoid twisting or turning. Change direction with your feet, not your body, and make sure there will be a place to plant your feet before you start out.

- When you reach your destination, bend your knees again. When you are ready to set your load down again, you still need to bear the weight with your legs, not your back. Bend your knees, and lower the object slowly. Do not let go until the object is placed securely on the surface where you are leaving it.
- Push, do not pull. When you are moving an object on rollers, for example, pushing is easier on your back, and there is less risk of injury if the object tips over.

## Immunizations

There is usually no increased risk of getting vaccine-preventable diseases, like diphtheria or tetanus (Td) during a flood. You should always try to keep your shots up-to-date, as a matter of routine, but there is no special urgency about being caught up right now. Adults should get a Td booster shot every 10 years throughout their life.

If you get a puncture wound, check with your doctor if you are not sure you have had a Td booster within the last five years.

## MDH Environmental Health flood information

Website: [www.health.state.mn.us/floods](http://www.health.state.mn.us/floods)

## MDH Environmental Health contacts

[www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/contacts](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/contacts)

### MDH DISTRICT OFFICES

- Bemidji 218-308-2100
- Duluth 218-302-6166
- Fergus Falls 218-332-5150
- Mankato 507-344-2700
- Marshall 507-476-4220
- Metro 651-201-4500
- Rochester 507-206-2700
- St. Cloud 320-223-7300

## Asbestos

### Asbestos and Lead Compliance:

651-201-4620

Email: [health.asbestos-lead@state.mn.us](mailto:health.asbestos-lead@state.mn.us)

Websites: [www.health.state.mn.us/asbestos](http://www.health.state.mn.us/asbestos)

[www.health.state.mn.us/lead](http://www.health.state.mn.us/lead)

## Carbon monoxide and mold

### MDH Indoor Air Quality:

651-201-4601 or 800-798-9050

E-mail: [health.indoorair@state.mn.us](mailto:health.indoorair@state.mn.us)

Website: [www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/air](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/air)

## Cleaning up and food safety

### MDH Food, Pools, and Lodging:

651-201-4500

E-mail: [health.foodlodging@state.mn.us](mailto:health.foodlodging@state.mn.us)

Website: [www.health.state.mn.us/foodsafety](http://www.health.state.mn.us/foodsafety)

## Public drinking water

### MDH Drinking Water Protection:

651-201-4700

E-mail: [health.drinkingwater@state.mn.us](mailto:health.drinkingwater@state.mn.us)

Website: [www.health.state.mn.us/water](http://www.health.state.mn.us/water)

## Wells and well water

### MDH Well Management:

651-201-4600 or 800-383-9808

E-mail: [health.wells@state.mn.us](mailto:health.wells@state.mn.us)

Website: [www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/wells](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/wells)

*To obtain this information in a different format, call 651-201-5000 or 1-800-657-3908*

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