

# WHAT SHOULD YOU DO AFTER A FLOOD?

For residents whose homes have been flooded

## INSTRUCTIONS TO REDUCE HEALTH AND SAFETY RISKS



If you have been evacuated :

- Wait for the authorities to give you the green light before returning home.
- Follow the safety guidelines that were given to you.

### Electricity



Water and electricity combined can cause electrocution or fire hazards.

- Consult a master electrician before :
  - returning home;
  - switching the power back on;
  - using any electrical or heating devices that have come into contact with water.



If your home has natural gas, contact a certified natural-gas contractor for your safety and to prevent carbon monoxide poisoning.

### Combustion appliances



Power washers, generators or other appliances that run with gas or fuels may release carbon monoxide which can cause severe or fatal intoxication.

- Never use these devices inside your home or near windows or doors.
- Purchase battery-powered carbon monoxide detectors.
- Should you notice any symptoms (e.g., headache, dizziness, fatigue, nausea) OR if the alarm rings :
  - Leave your home right away and dial 911;
  - Do not return home until firefighters or an expert have advised that it is safe.



**During power outages, never use auxiliary heaters, cooking devices, camping devices or barbecues inside your home.**

### Drinking water



Your drinking water might have been contaminated with microbes by the flood and might cause gastroenteritis.

If the source of your drinking water is :

- A public water supply system :
  - It is probably safe for consumption.
    - ✓ Follow your municipality's or supplier's instructions.
- Your well :
  - Consider your water unsafe for consumption until proven otherwise (even if it is clear).  
For drinking, preparing foods or brushing your teeth :
    - ✓ Use bottled water or water from a public water supply system OR;
    - ✓ Boil tap water at a rolling boil for at least 1 minute before using it.
  - If the water is murky or has an unusual smell :
    - ✓ Do not drink that water! Use bottled water instead.
  - Consult the [ministère de l'Environnement, de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs](#) to learn how to :
    - ✓ Decontaminate your well;
    - ✓ Have your water tested before using it for consumption.

### Food, medications, dishware



Soiled medication, food, dishes, and utensils can become contaminated and cause food poisoning and gastroenteritis.

#### Food and medications

- Return all medications that have come into contact with floodwater to a pharmacy (instead of throwing them out).
- Throw out any food that has come into contact with floodwater.
- If there has been a power outage, consult the factsheet « [Keeping or throwing away food after a power outage or flood](#) » and the « [Thermoguide](#) » from the ministère de l'Agriculture, des Pêcheries et de l'Alimentation du Québec.

#### Dishware, utensils and kitchen countertops

- Wash first with warm, soapy water, and then rinse. Dishware and utensils can be washed in the dishwasher.
- Disinfect with a solution of bleach and water (4 teaspoons (20 mL) of 5 % bleach for 4 L/1 gallon of clean clear water). Allow to air dry. Do not rinse.
- If there was a sewer backup, disinfect with a solution of bleach and water (3 tablespoons (45 mL) of 5 % bleach for 4 L/1 gallon of clean clear water). Allow to air dry. Do not rinse.

## Cleaning objects and surfaces



Floodwater may contain microbes or chemical products, contaminate objects and surfaces, and cause infections or skin irritations as well as gastroenteritis.

- Wear gloves when handling or cleaning contaminated objects. Wash your hands frequently.
- Wear protective gear (i.e., boots, mask), depending on circumstances.
- Clean surfaces and objects with an all-purpose detergent.

In the case of a sewer backup :

- First clean all surfaces with warm, soapy water and dry.
- Disinfect with a solution of water and bleach (3 tablespoons (45mL) of 5 % bleach for 4 L/1 gallon of clean water) and then air dry. Do not rinse.

## Caution!



- Always properly ventilate the area where you are cleaning.
- Be careful when using bleach :
  - It is corrosive;
  - It may release toxic fumes;
  - Do not combine bleach with an ammonia-based detergent or with an acidic substance (e.g., vinegar) or any other type of disinfectant.
- Be aware of the risk of accidents due to handling materials, waste, flood debris, etc.
- Don't overdo it; go easy on your back, shoulders and knees.
- In the case of deep or dirty wounds, contact your doctor to determine if you need a tetanus shot.
- Keep children away during work to dispose of materials.
- Beware of the risk of hypothermia when you are wet in a cold environment.

## Mould

### To prevent mould

Stagnant water, soiled or damp materials and humidity are good growing conditions for mould, which can cause or aggravate existing health problems (e.g., asthma).

- Remove water and discard any porous and wet items that cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried (e.g., mattress, carpet, upholstered furniture, pressed wood).
- Remove the wet or humid drywall and mineral wool from affected walls up to 50 cm/20 inches above the flood water line.
- Ventilate, heat, and dehumidify to obtain a humidity level between 30 % and 50 %.
- Check for any **signs of mould** to quickly take all necessary remedial actions :
  - Musty, earthy, or fermented odour;
  - Coloured or blackish stains covering the surface of materials;
  - Humidity rings, blistering or peeling paint.

### To eliminate mould

If, despite the measures taken, mould appears and threatens to cause or aggravate health problems.

- Identify all sources of mould and eliminate them.
- If the moulds cover a broad surface area or if major work is required, contact a qualified professional as specific precautions need to be taken.
- Wear gloves when manipulating objects or materials covered with mould.
- Throw away any mouldy porous materials, even if they are not damp (drywall, sound-proofing ceiling tiles, upholstery, etc.).
- Clean hard surfaces affected by mould (e.g., floor, ceramic, wooden furniture, etc.) using a cleaning solution of water and all-purpose detergent.
- Rinse and dry rapidly.

## Stress and anxiety



Any flood can cause a lot of stress, anxiety and worries.

- Call Info-Santé at 811, if you need help.

For more information, visit the « [Flooding](#) » section on the Quebec.ca website and the « [In case of flood](#) » guide.