

STAY SAFE AFTER HURRICANE FLORENCE

September 18, 2018

CDC Priority
Messages

Stay Safe after Hurricane Florence

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Hurricanes can cause dangerous and destructive high winds, storm surge, heavy rain, and flooding. Carbon monoxide poisoning from generators, electrocution from downed power lines, and drowning from wading or driving through floodwaters can cause injury and even death.

Follow these tips to keep yourself and your family safe during and immediately after Hurricane Florence:

Stay out of flood waters

- Follow local flood watches, warnings and instructions.
- Turn around, don't drown. Avoid driving through flooded areas, especially when the water is fast moving. As little as six inches of water can cause you to lose control of your vehicle.
- Do not walk through or swim in [flood water](#). It can contain electrical, chemical, and infectious hazards.

Prevent infections from floodwaters:

- Cover cuts or abrasions with waterproof bandages or other coverings that seal out water. Keep wounds as clean as possible by washing with soap and clean water.
- If you come in contact with flood water, wash your hands with soap and water. If you don't have soap or water, use alcohol-based wipes or sanitizer.
- Do not enter or drink floodwater or any fresh water source that may be contaminated by floodwater runoff.
- When you are near floodwater or soil that may be contaminated, wear waterproof protective clothing, shoes or boots.

Stay safe during a power outage

- Portable generators, gas grills, and other gas-powered devices may emit carbon monoxide, which is an invisible, odorless gas. Avoid [carbon monoxide \(CO\) poisoning](#) after a disaster.
- Use a portable generator safely:
 - Place them **ONLY** outdoors in a dry area at least 20 feet away from doors, windows and vents.
 - Use a battery-powered or plug-in CO detector with battery backup in your home.
 - Do not connect generators to your home's electrical circuits without the approved, automatic-interrupt devices. Connecting a generator without an automatic-interrupt device may endanger line workers helping to restore power in your area and when electrical service is restored it can become a major fire hazard.
- Stay cool and drink plenty of fluids to [prevent heat-related illness](#).
- NEVER touch a fallen power line. Call the power company to report fallen power lines. Do not walk or drive through standing water if downed power lines are in the water.

- Use [battery-powered flashlights and lanterns](#), rather than candles, gas lanterns, or torches (to minimize the risk of fire).

Stay safe in a shelter or in crowded living conditions

- [Wash hands with soap and water](#) to reduce the number of germs on them. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Practice safe and germ-free diaper [changing](#) in emergency situations.
- If you are pregnant or think you may be, tell the shelter staff.
- Do not return home until authorities tell you it is safe.

Eat safe food

After a power outage or flood, food in your kitchen or pantry may be unsafe to eat, even if it looks, smells and tastes normal. **When in doubt, throw it out.**

[Throw away the following foods:](#)

- Food that may have come in contact with flood or storm water.
- Food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture.
- Perishable foods (including meat, poultry, fish, eggs and leftovers) in your refrigerator when the power has been off for 4 hours or more, or in a full freezer if the power has been off for 48 hours or more (24 hours for a partially full freezer).

[Feed your baby safely:](#)

- If you breastfeed your baby, continue to do so. If you feed your baby formula, use ready-to-feed formula if possible.
- Always [clean infant feeding items](#) with bottled, boiled, or treated water and soap before each use. If you cannot clean infant feeding supplies safely, children can lap up milk from a disposable cup, if available. Throw out bottle nipples or pacifiers that have been in contact with floodwater.

Drink clean water

- After an emergency, especially after flooding, drinking water may not be available or safe to drink. Use [bottled, boiled, or treated water when local authorities recommend it](#).
- Do not use water you suspect or have been told is contaminated to wash dishes, brush your teeth, cook, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula.
- If you suspect that your well or water source has been affected by floodwater, get it tested before drinking the water.

Clean and sanitize your home

When [returning to your home](#) after a hurricane or flood, be aware that flood water may contain sewage and other hazards. Protect yourself and your family by following these steps:

- Keep children and pets out of the affected area until cleanup has been completed.

- Wear personal protective equipment, including rubber boots, rubber gloves, and goggles during cleanup.
- When you have been told it is safe to return home, clean up and dry your home quickly to prevent [mold growth](#). Use fans to dry out the building. Position fans to blow air out doors or windows.
 - People with a weakened immune system, especially people receiving treatment for cancer, people who have had an organ or stem cell transplant, and people taking medicines that suppress the immune system, should avoid cleaning up mold. Children under 12 should not enter a building with mold damage.
- When in doubt, take it out! Remove all porous items (e.g. drywall) that have been wet for more than 48 hours and that cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried. These items can remain a source of mold growth and should be removed from the home.
- Thoroughly clean all hard surfaces with hot water and laundry or dish detergent.
- Remove and discard affected items that cannot be washed and disinfected, like furniture.
- Throw out wooden cutting boards, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers.
- Wash clothes contaminated with flood or sewage water in hot water and detergent. These clothes should be washed separately from uncontaminated clothes and linens.
- Prevent rodent infestation by keeping food, water and trash in closed containers.
- After completing the cleanup, wash your hands with soap and clean water.
- Seek immediate medical attention if you become injured or ill.

Prevent injury

- Stay away from damaged buildings or structures until a building inspector or other government authority has had a chance to examine it and certify that it's safe.
- When using a [chain saw](#), always follow manufacturer's instructions. Wear appropriate protective gear and be sure that bystanders are a safe distance away.
- [Avoid electrical hazards:](#)
 - NEVER touch a downed power line. Do not clean up or work near a downed power line unless utility workers have turned off the power and grounded the lines.
 - Do not enter flooded areas or touch electrical devices or appliances if the ground is wet unless you know the power is off.
 - If electrical circuits and electrical equipment have gotten wet or are in or near water, turn off the power at the main breaker or fuse on the service panel. Do not enter standing water to access the main power switch. Call an electrician to turn it off.
 - Do not turn the power back on until electrical devices and circuits have been inspected by a qualified electrician.

Additional resources:

- CDC's Hurricane Florence web page: <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/hurricane-florence.html>

- Disasters affect children differently than they do adults. Learn more about the unique needs of children during and after disasters: <https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/before-during-after.html>
- If you have family or friends in the path of Hurricane Florence, share health and safety messages with them using our multimedia toolkit: [How to Help Loved Ones in Hurricane-Affected Areas](#).
- Be prepared to [cope](#) with feelings of fear, grief and depression after a traumatic event. The Disaster Distress Helpline (disasterdistress.samhsa.gov) provides 24/7, year-round crisis counseling and support. Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746.