

STAY SAFE AFTER HURRICANE FLORENCE

September 28, 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 floodwater can cause injury and even death.

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

Stay out of floodwater

- 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 [floodwater](#). It can contain electrical, chemical, and infectious hazards. When you are near floodwater or soil that may be contaminated, wear waterproof protective clothing, shoes or boots.
- Prevent infections by keeping cuts covered. If you come in contact with floodwater, wash with soap and clean water or use alcohol-based sanitizer.

Stay safe during a power outage

- NEVER touch a fallen power line or water that has a power line in it. Call the power company to report fallen power lines.
- Use [battery-powered flashlights and lanterns](#), rather than candles, gas lanterns, or torches (to minimize the risk of fire).
- 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](#).

Stay safe in the heat

- Take heat stress very seriously—it can lead to heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps, fainting, permanent disability, and even death.
- Drink plenty of water—avoiding drinks with caffeine, alcohol, or large amounts of sugar.
- Wear hats with a wide brim and use ample sunscreen.
- Take plenty of breaks in a cool or shady area. When it's really hot and humid, you might need to work 15 minutes and rest for 45 minutes!
- Try to do work outside in the early morning or in the evening—avoid working during the

hottest hours of the day as much as possible.

- You are at greater risk of heat-related illness if you are 65 or older, overweight, have heart disease or high blood pressure. Be aware of the [signs and symptoms of heat-related illness](#).

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. Learn more: <https://www.cdc.gov/features/disasters-infant-feeding/>
- 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. Learn more: <https://www.cdc.gov/features/disasters-infant-feeding/>

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

Do not return home until authorities say it is safe.

When [returning to your home](#) after a hurricane or flood, 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 an N-95 mask, rubber boots, rubber gloves, and goggles during cleanup. Children should not participate in clean-up activities. 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 breathing problems like asthma or who have weakened immune systems should stay away from moldy sites.

- 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.
- Clean up and repairs after a disaster can potentially expose you to contaminants such as [asbestos](#) and [lead](#).
 - Breathing asbestos can cause cancer and other diseases. If you live in a home built before 1980, avoid disturbing building materials that might contain asbestos. These materials include vermiculite attic insulation, pipe and furnace insulation, siding, flooring, and popcorn ceilings.
 - Homes built before 1978 (when lead-based paints were banned) probably contain lead-based paint. Children can be [poisoned](#) when they swallow or breathe in lead dust. Make sure your child does not have access to peeling paint or chewable surfaces painted with lead-based paint, and regularly wash children’s hands and toys. Wet-mop floors and wet-wipe window components.

Prevent injury and illness

- Seek immediate medical attention if you become injured, ill or are having trouble dealing with stress.
- 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.
- Infectious disease outbreaks of diarrheal and respiratory illnesses can occur when access to safe water and sewage systems are disrupted, personal hygiene is difficult to maintain, and people are living in crowded conditions, such as shelters.
 - Post-hurricane conditions also may pose an increased risk for the spread of common infectious diseases, like influenza and less common illnesses, like leptospirosis, hepatitis A, and vibriosis.

- Clean up, disinfect, and practice good hygiene to avoid illness from bacteria, viruses, mold, and mildew.

Protect yourself from chemicals

During emergencies such as hurricanes and floods, household, medical, and industrial chemicals can be released into the environment.

- Stay out of floodwater. It can contain human and livestock waste, coal ash, and other contaminants that can lead to illness.
- Call 911 or the national poison control center at 1-800-222-1222 if you suspect someone has been poisoned by a chemical. Call the Animal Poison Control Center at 1-888-426-4435 if you suspect a pet has been poisoned by a chemical.
- Report oil and chemical spills to the local authorities or to the [National Response Center](#) at 1-800-424-8802. Do not touch or move unknown containers.
- Listen to announcements or alerts from authorities about chemical safety and disposal issues.
- Listen to local announcements for guidance on what to do in the event of a chemical release. You may need to [evacuate](#) or you may need to [shelter in place](#).
- Wash skin that may have come into contact with chemicals or floodwater with soap and clean water as soon as possible. You may need to remove and dispose of your clothing, then [decontaminate yourself](#) to reduce or remove the chemical so it is no longer a hazard.

Manage your chronic disease

- If you need medication for a pre-existing chronic condition, Healthcare Ready may help you in getting them at no cost. You can also get information on which pharmacies are open in the impacted regions. Call 1-866-247-2694 to enroll or visit <https://www.healthcareready.org/rxopen>.
- A hurricane may lead to limited access to water in its aftermath. Cancer patients and people with a weakened immune system should be cautious. If you do not have soap and clean water to keep your hands clean, use an alcohol-based sanitizer to lower infection risk.
- Foot wounds or infections can develop into serious problems for people with diabetes, so foot care is especially important during and after a natural disaster.
- Hurricanes cause disruptions and stress. If you have epilepsy this could make seizures worse. Rest, take your medicine, and let your doctor know if your seizures change.

Protect your mental health

- Be prepared to cope with feelings of fear, grief and depression after a traumatic event.
- After a natural disaster, it is normal to feel sad, mad, or guilty — you may have lost a great deal. Your coping skills may change during periods of crisis and heightened stress, limiting your normal ability to effectively solve problems and cope. Stay in touch with family and friends, find a support network, and talk with a counselor. Getting involved with others can help.
- Postpartum depression can occur after having a baby; however, it is treatable and most women get better with treatment. To help relieve emotional stress, talk to a healthcare provider, friend, or family member about your concerns and feelings. Learn more: <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/depression/index.htm>
- 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.

Keep pets healthy

- Check your home for sharp objects, spilled chemicals, and exposed wiring to protect your family and your pets from injury.
- Monitor animals closely and only release them in a safe and secure environment.
- The behavior of animals may change dramatically after a flood, flash flood, thunderstorm, or hurricane. Normally quiet and friendly animals may become irritable.
- Contact a veterinarian if you notice any signs of stress, discomfort, injury, or illness in your pets.
- The [American Veterinary Medical Association](#) offers specific advice for basic first aid in the case of poisoning, seizures, fractures, external and internal bleeding, burns, choking, heatstroke, and what to do if your pet has no heartbeat or is not breathing.
- Make sure pets are up to date on vaccinations.

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>
- Older adults with certain chronic diseases or disabilities require assistance to survive and recover from a disaster. Learn more <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/emergency/index.htm>
- 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](#)
- Information on infant feeding can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/features/disasters-infant-feeding/>
- Information for expectant or new parents can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/features/disaster-planning-parents/index.html>