



After a Hurricane: Key Facts About Infectious Disease

Although infectious diseases are a frightening prospect, widespread outbreaks of infectious disease after hurricanes are not common in the United States. Rare and deadly exotic diseases, such as cholera or typhoid, do not suddenly break out after hurricanes and floods in areas where such diseases do not naturally occur.

Communicable disease outbreaks of diarrhea and respiratory illness can occur when water and sewage systems are not working and personal hygiene is hard to maintain as a result of a disaster.

- **Decaying bodies create very little risk for major disease outbreaks.**
- Short bouts of diarrhea and upset stomach and colds or other breathing diseases sometimes occur in developed countries, such as the United States, after a natural disaster, particularly among large groups of people in a shelter. Basic hygiene measures like frequent [hand washing or use of an alcohol hand gel](#), especially after using the restroom or changing diapers and before eating, can help prevent these diseases.
- Diseases like cholera or typhoid are rare in developed countries, and do not typically occur after a natural disaster. Unless a disease is brought into a disaster area from elsewhere, any outbreaks that occur are almost always from diseases that were already in the disaster-affected area before the disaster struck.
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- **Because cholera and typhoid are not commonly found in the U.S. Gulf States area, it is very unlikely that they would occur after Hurricane Katrina.**
- Communicable disease outbreaks can occur when sanitation and hygiene are compromised as a result of a disaster.
- As has been the case in past hurricanes, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services quickly sets up tracking systems that monitor illnesses in hurricane-affected areas. In the unlikely event that a disease outbreak occurs, these systems provide an early warning that enables prompt public health response.

For more information on how to protect yourself from disease after a hurricane, see CDC's guidance, [Key Facts About Hurricane Recovery: Protect Your Health and Safety After a Hurricane](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/recovery.asp) (<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/recovery.asp>).

For more information, visit www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters, or call CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or 888-232-6348 (TTY).

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