

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 30, 2005

HEALTH DEPARTMENT OFFERS ADVICE FOR FLOOD CLEAN-UP SAFETY

Philadelphia-The Department of Public Health urges residents to keep in mind the possibility that flood warnings could be issued in our area over the next few days. Should flooding occur the department encourages the public to avoid injury or illness in cleaning homes and businesses. Floodwater contains mostly dirt and debris. However, it may contain a very small amount of chemicals or possibly sewage that poses a health risk. In addition, a flood may cause electrical hazards and compromise the safety of food and medicines.

In the event of a flood, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health advises the following cleanup tips.

CLEANING YOUR HOME OR BUSINESS

- Remove all standing water by pumping, mopping, and opening clogged drains.
- Avoid electrical shocks! Do not stand in pools of water unless you know the electricity is turned off.
- After turning off the electricity, all wet light fixtures should be cleaned and dried thoroughly before turning the electricity back on.
- Remove and dispose of all wet ceiling tiles, paper products, baseboards, and gypsum board (also known as dry wall) to a level approximately four feet above the flood water line. Remove wet insulation and materials that absorb water.
- Carpets can be saved by wet vacuuming, shampooing, and taking steps to assure that the carpet is totally dry.
- Wood and metal studs should be wiped with the bleach solution twice and allowed to air dry.
- Cabinets and household equipment should first be cleaned with soap and water, then make a disinfecting solution of 1/4 cup of bleach in one gallon of clean water and wipe down all areas touched by the floodwater. Disinfect all contaminated floors and other surfaces and allow to dry.
- If possible, open windows and doors during cleaning and for at least 24 hours after the cleaning to allow surfaces to thoroughly dry and prevent mold. Use fans or dehumidifiers to shorten drying times.

- Clothing and bedding exposed to flood water should be soaked in clean water to remove any mud, then wash in hot water or, if hot water is not available, add a disinfectant such as bleach to the rinse water. Mattresses or other large items soaked with floodwater will probably have to be discarded. However, if they are made of foam rubber, it may be possible to wash, disinfect and air-dry these items.

PROTECTING YOUR HEALTH

- Do not let children play with wet toys or other items until these have been cleaned and disinfected. Wipe these items with a diluted bleach solution or by washing the toys in a dishwasher using hot water.
- Those performing the cleanup should practice good personal hygiene by washing their hands after completing cleanup and before touching food or beverages, or smoking. Wear waterproof gloves and protective clothing. Protective gear should be discarded or washed after cleanup is completed each day.
- Keep children from playing on lawns and fields until the ground surface has dried.
- Contact your physician or health care provider if you or a family member develops any of the following symptoms within five days: fever greater than 100 degrees, vomiting, diarrhea, and/or severe stomach cramps.
- If you receive a puncture wound or other injury during the flood or while you perform flood cleanup, talk with your health care provider about the need for treatment and/or a tetanus shot.

MEDICINES, FOOD, AND KITCHEN ITEMS:

- Discard all medicines and foods in contact with floodwater. Throw out all perishable foods that have been out of refrigeration for more than six hours. Do not refreeze frozen foods that have been thawed.
- All cooking and eating utensils, food preparation surfaces, counters and work surfaces that were touched or splashed by flood water should be washed with soap and water and wiped with a diluted bleach solution.

For further information call the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Environmental Engineering Section, Monday-Friday (8 am-4:30 pm) at 215- 685-7342