

Keeping Your Lungs Safe During Flood Clean Up

Floods can be extremely dangerous, and the flood water itself — even after it recedes — may put lung health at risk because of sewage and chemicals in the water and mold. To best protect your lung health after a flood and during the clean-up, here are four quick things to know:

1. Protect your family's health from the start.

Identify vulnerable family members, which include children, older adults and anyone with chronic lung diseases like asthma or COPD (which includes emphysema and chronic bronchitis), and do your best to limit their exposure to the clean-up process. Protect workers with N95 mask (available at hardware stores), disposable gloves and goggles.

2. Start by stopping the water intrusions. Trace the pathways of the water to find where damage has spread. Contain the water-damaged materials and furnishings and protect your family from exposure to them, as they may contain toxins from the flood waters or mold.

3. Turn off the electricity and gas at the main location during clean-up. In addition, do not use portable gasoline- or diesel-powered generators, power washers, grills, camp stoves or other gasoline, propane or charcoal-burning equipment and other devices inside. These produce carbon monoxide that can kill occupants if it builds up indoors.



4. Clean what you can, and discard the rest.

Materials that can be cleaned must be cleaned with water and detergent, and dried thoroughly. Do not use bleach, which can make it hard to breathe. Remove everything that has been soaked by water and are damaged beyond use, as they may harbor mold or dangerous toxins from the flood waters.

If you are worried about your family's lung health and have questions, call 1-800-LUNGUSA to talk to American Lung Association health professionals.

It is not uncommon for people to develop lung problems after a natural disaster, even if they've never had problems before. Be aware of any breathing problems that may arise, including:

- Coughing, especially at night
- Wheezing or feeling short of breath
- Chest tightness or pain
- Get immediate emergency medical help if fingernails or lips are turning blue or if there is severe chest pain. Both could be life-threatening.