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Environmental Health Concerns Following a Flooding Event

The Cayuga County Health Department has issued the following recommendations in regards to the recent flooding event impacting portions of Cayuga County.

Flood water and water bodies impacted by flood waters are often contaminated with debris, household chemicals, and pathogens that have been washed from the land within the flooded area. Individuals should avoid swimming and recreating in waters for a few days following a flood event and especially while waters are turbid or cloudy.

Septic systems that are flooded may contribute bacteria and viruses to the flood waters. If your septic system is covered with flood water, do not use your household fixtures (showers, washing machines, toilets, etc.) If necessary, obtain portable toilets, such as those used for camping while your septic system is submerged. Once floodwaters have receded, if your system appears to be damaged, contact a septic system professional to service your system or contact the Environmental Division of the Cayuga County Health Department for advice.

The Cayuga County Health Department recommends that if the area around a homeowner's well gets flooded or if it is suspected that the well is contaminated due to flooding, the well should be disinfected and then tested for bacteria contamination before using it for drinking water or for cooking. The following link has information regarding disinfecting a private well: <http://www.cayugacounty.us/Community/Health/Environmental-Health/Private-Wells> After disinfecting the well and when chlorine odor is gone, wait a few days, then take a sample to a private New York State certified laboratory for bacterial analysis to determine whether contamination has been eliminated. Laboratories certified by New York State can be found at this link: <https://apps.health.ny.gov/pubdoh/applinks/wc/elappublicweb/>

Until testing shows that the water is free of contamination, the water should be boiled for one minute and then cooled before usage or bottled water that has been labeled as certified by the New York State Department of Health should be used. If flooding and groundwater contamination is extensive, your well may not be a suitable source of drinking water for some time. Severe flooding that damages the well casing, deposits debris around the well or submerges electrical controls will require a qualified professional for evaluation, servicing and disinfection.

Following a flood event, the Cayuga County Health Department advises the following when cleaning your homes impacted by floodwaters:

- Wear protective clothing including rubber boots and gloves.



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- When doing work that could create dust or flying debris, wear eye protection and a dust mask.
- Remove wet materials. Discard items soaked by floodwaters that cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried within 24 to 48 hours.
- Thoroughly wash walls, floors, closets, shelves, and nonporous house contents impacted by the floodwaters with household cleaners or soap and water. Disinfect with a solution of one cup bleach to five gallons water. *(Be careful about mixing household cleaners and disinfectants together. Check labels for warnings.)*
- Carefully clean surfaces that come in contact with food and children's play areas.
- Replace disposable filters in your heating/cooling system and any wet fiberboard and insulation.
- Clean and disinfect heating and air conditioning ducts that have been flooded. Consider hiring professionals for this service.
- Open windows and doors. Use fans and dehumidifiers during and after the use of cleaning and disinfecting products.
- Discard food without a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with floodwaters.

Mold growth can become a problem if wet materials are not thoroughly dried or discarded quickly. Mold can be a trigger for people with allergies or asthma. For information about mold and how to clean it up, visit <https://www.health.ny.gov/publications/7287/>
