



# returning to your flooded home

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If you had to leave your home because of a hurricane or other natural disaster that caused flooding, you are probably eager to return. It's important to remember that even if your home looks fine, the flooding could have created safety hazards. Below you'll find tips for safely returning to a home that has been flooded and assessing the damage.

### General safety rules

A disaster leaves damage beyond the obvious destruction and debris.

In returning to flooded areas, these safety measures can help you avoid illness and injury.

**Make sure it's safe to go back.** Stay tuned to your radio or TV to find out when you can go back home. Or watch for notices on the social media pages of local authorities. Don't return until those authorities have given the OK.

**Check to see if you've received a tetanus shot within the last 10 years.** There will be more germs and dangerous organisms in

the affected areas, and any broken skin, even a scrape, will put you at risk for infection.

**Infants, children, pregnant women, pets, and people with health problems** should avoid the flooded area until cleanup is complete. Small children tend to put things in their mouths, and young children may be upset to see the destruction. Pregnant women should avoid injury and exposure to disease. Pets may get underfoot, lost, or injured. People with health problems (including those with breathing problems and compromised immune systems) are more likely to get sick or be injured.

**Wash your hands with soap and water thoroughly and often.** You'll be exposed to dangerous chemicals and germs that you're not used to. Be sure to wash after doing any cleanup work in your home as well as before and after preparing food and using the bathroom. If possible, use an antibacterial soap. This is important even if you've been wearing gloves in the flooded area.

**Confirm that the water is clean and safe.** Don't drink it, wash dishes with it, or clean yourself with it until local authorities declare it to be safe. When preparing food, use only water that has been boiled or disinfected.

**Be alert to injury and infection.** If you receive a puncture wound or a wound that may have been contaminated with feces, soil, or saliva, have a doctor or health department official determine whether a tetanus booster is necessary.

**Bring the right materials and clothing** if you have experience in construction and electrical repair and will be doing repairs yourself. If you don't have experience in construction and electrical repair, contact a professional, such as an electrician.

If you'll be doing the repairs, you'll need to bring the following items, some of which may also be helpful if you aren't yet sure what you can do yourself:

- photo ID that shows your address, as proof that you belong in the area
- bottled water
- battery-powered flashlight or lantern

- first-aid kit
- battery-operated radio
- long-sleeved shirt and long pants
- waterproof boots or waders
- safety clothing, such as a hard hat and gloves
- boots or shoes with hard rubber soles
- dust mask
- tools, including crowbar, hammer, saw, pliers, crescent wrench, and screwdrivers
- trash bags
- sealable plastic bags, for temporarily storing items recovered at your home
- a wooden stick for turning things over, scaring away snakes and small animals, and moving electrical wires
- cleaning supplies
- a camera (if your phone doesn't have one) for documenting the damage for your insurance company
- a phone

Bring someone with you whenever you check your home and do repairs.

**Guard against mosquitoes.** Rain and flooding may mean more mosquitoes. Wear long pants, socks, and long-sleeved shirts, and use insect repellents that contain DEET or Picaridin (also known as Icaridin). Follow directions on the label, and take care when using DEET on small children. To help control mosquitoes, drain all standing water left outdoors in open containers, such as flowerpots and tires.

## Reentering your home

Check your home before you go in. Visit in the daylight, and walk carefully around the outside of your home, noting the following:

**If there is standing water next to the outside walls of your home, don't go in.** You won't be able to tell whether the building is safe or structurally sound. Avoid wading in the water, which may contain glass or metal fragments.

**Check for loose power lines and gas leaks.** You'll know there is leaking gas if you smell its distinctive odor or hear a hissing sound. If you find downed power lines or a gas leak, leave your home immediately, and call the gas company or the police or fire department from a safe location. Don't return to the area until you're given the all-clear.

**Check the foundation for cracks or other damage.** Examine porch roofs and overhangs to be sure they still have all their supports. Look for gaps between the steps and the home. If any supports or portions of the foundation wall are missing or the ground has washed away, the floor is not safe. If you see obvious damage, have a building inspector check the home before you go in. If you have any doubts about safety, contact a contractor before going in.

If, from your outside inspection, the home appears safe, then go inside carefully and be alert to your surroundings.

**If a door sticks and has to be forced open, it is probably swollen.** If it sticks only at the bottom, it can be forced open. If it sticks at the top, your ceiling may be ready to fall. You can force the door open, but wait outside the doorway for a while so you will be protected if something falls. If the door won't open, you can enter through a window, but look carefully at the ceiling before you go in to be sure it is not in danger of falling.

**If you have standing water in your home and can turn off the main power switch from a dry location, then go ahead and turn off the power,** even if it delays cleaning. If you can't access the main power switch without stepping through water, then call an electrician to turn it off. **NEVER turn power on or off yourself or use an electric tool or appliance while standing in water.**

**Open the doors and windows to let the home air out for a while** (at least 30 minutes) before you stay for any length of time. **Do not smoke or use candles, gas lanterns, or other open flames in your home.** There may be undetectable explosive gas inside.

**Check the ceiling for signs of sagging.** Your ceiling might be holding water and could be very heavy and dangerous if it fell.

**Check the floor for signs of sagging.** Bear in mind that flooring damaged by water could collapse under your weight. Avoid walking on sagging floors.

**Step carefully.** Water and mud make a floor very slippery. Also, watch for loose flooring, holes, and nails.

**Beware of rodents, snakes, spiders, and insects** that may have entered your home. As you inspect your home, tap loudly and often on the floor with a stick to give notice that you're there and to frighten animals away.

**Check for cabinets and other tall furniture that may be ready to fall.** Remove mirrors and heavy pictures from walls. They won't stay up if the wallboard is wet.

## Electricity and gas

You'll need to turn off the utilities in your home. But remember that if the electricity and gas controls are inside, *do not* turn them off until you can *safely* enter.

If you have any doubts or concerns about safety or your ability to turn off the utilities, contact a professional.

**Electricity.** Even if the power company has turned off electricity to the area, you must still make certain your home's power supply is disconnected. You don't want the power company to turn on the electricity without warning while you're working on your home.

Even if the power company has removed your electric meter, the electricity must be turned off at the main breaker box or fuse box. Use a dry wooden stick or pole to manipulate the breaker box or fuse box, not your hand. And -- very important -- if you have to step in water to get to your electric box, call an electrician.

**Unplug all appliances and lamps, remove all lightbulbs, and remove the cover plates to wall switches and outlets that got wet.** If you're experienced in working with electrical wires and your building code allows, disconnect the wiring from the switches and outlets. Otherwise, leave the wires connected and pull them out of their boxes. They can be replaced later by an electrician.

**Gas.** If you have a propane tank system, turn off all valves and contact a propane supplier to check the system. If you have gas appliances that were flooded, you'll need to clean the mud out of the pilot and burners. But first, you must turn off the gas. Call your gas company for instructions on how to do this.

If you suspect a leak or smell gas, leave your home immediately, leaving your door open, and then call the gas company or the police or fire department. Call 911 if you or are in immediate danger and need emergency help.

Do not return to the home until you are told it's safe to do so. You'll need to take extra precautions if your home has an underground storage tank (UST), if it may contain lead or asbestos, or if certain other hazards are present. To learn about them, visit the Flooding section of the Environmental Protection Agency website at [www.epa.gov/natural-disasters/flooding](http://www.epa.gov/natural-disasters/flooding).

Some of the biggest issues that people face after floods go beyond storm damage. You and your family may also suffer from emotional distress. Keep talking openly together as you assess the damage to your home and community and figure out how you will move forward in the coming days and weeks.

You'll find more tips on the websites for the American Red Cross ([www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency ([www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)).

This article is adapted from *Repairing Your Flooded Home*, published by the American Red Cross.

## Employee Assistance and WorkLife Services

As a reminder, if you or someone you love is struggling with stress, worry or anxiety related to this natural disaster, advisors with Chevron's Employee Assistance and WorkLife Services program can help. Our licensed, professional mental health consultants can provide guidance, resources, and support. The service is confidential and is provided at no cost to you and your covered dependents. CTN 842-3333 or 925-842-3333.