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## **Steps to stay safe when returning to a flooded home and telephone assistance for residents**

Cape May Court House – November 1, 2012. When returning to a home that's been flooded after a hurricane or other natural disaster, be aware that your house may be contaminated with mold or sewage, which can cause health risks for your family. "We understand that everyone needs to get back to their homes as soon as possible to start the clean-up process," said Health Officer Kevin Thomas. "Please take a moment to read over the following information and stay safe as you move through the recovery phase," he added.

To help New Jersey residents as they cleanup their homes and businesses after Hurricane Sandy, the New Jersey Department of Health has public health experts available through the state's 2-1-1 system to answer questions about food and water safety and general environmental health information including mold removal. Concerned residents can call 2-1-1 or 1-866-234-0964 between 8 am to 8 pm on weekdays and 10 am to 5 pm on weekends. Additional information for recovering from flooding is available at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/>.

## **When You First Reenter Your Home**

- If you have standing water in your home and can turn off the main power from a dry location, turn off the power. If you must enter standing water to access the main power switch, 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.** Have an electrician check the house's electrical system before turning the power on again.
- If you smell gas or suspect a leak, turn off the main gas valve, open all windows, and leave the house immediately. Notify the gas company or the police or fire departments, and do not turn on the lights or do anything that could cause a spark. Do not return to the house until you are told it is safe to do so.
- If the house has been closed up for several days, enter briefly to open doors and windows to let the house air out for awhile (at least 30 minutes) before you stay for any length of time.
- If your home has been flooded and has been closed up for several days, presume your home has been contaminated with mold. (See "Protect Yourself from Mold" at <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/mold/protect.asp>).
- If your home has been flooded, it also may be contaminated with sewage. (See "After a Hurricane or Flood: Cleanup of Flood Water" at <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/cleanupwater.asp>).

**Dry Out Your House.** If flood or storm water has entered your home, dry it out as soon as possible. Follow these steps:

- If you have electricity and it is safe to turn it on, use a "wet-dry" shop vacuum (or the vacuum function of a carpet steam cleaner), an electric-powered water transfer pump, or sump pump to

remove standing water. If you are operating equipment in wet areas, be sure to wear rubber boots.

- If you do not have electricity, or it is not safe to turn it on, you can use a portable generator to power equipment to remove standing water. **Note: Never operate gasoline engines inside a home, basement, garage, carport, porch, or other enclosed or partially enclosed structures, even if the windows and doors are open. Such improper use can create dangerously high levels of carbon monoxide and cause carbon monoxide poisoning.**
- If weather permits, open windows and doors of the house to aid in the drying-out process. Use fans and dehumidifiers to remove excess moisture. Fans should be placed at a window or door to blow the air outwards rather than inwards, so not to spread the mold.
- Have your home heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning (HVAC) system checked and cleaned by a service professional who is experienced in mold clean-up **before you turn it on.** If the HVAC system was flooded with water, turning on the mold-contaminated HVAC will spread mold throughout the house. When the service determines that your system is clean, you can turn it on and use it to help remove excess moisture from your home.
- Prevent water outdoors from reentering your home. For example, rain water from gutters or the roof should drain away from the house; the ground around the house should slope away from the house to keep basements and crawl spaces dry.

**Clean Your Home and Stop Mold.** If you plan to be in the home for a while or if you are cleaning up mold, you should buy a N95 mask at your local home supply store and wear it while in the building.

- Take out items that have soaked up water and that cannot be cleaned and dried.
- To remove mold, mix 1 cup of bleach in 1 gallon of water, wash the item with the bleach mixture, scrub rough surfaces with a stiff brush, rinse the item with clean water, then dry it or leave it to dry.
- To clean hard surfaces that do not soak up water and that may have been in contact with floodwater, first wash with soap and clean water. Next disinfect with a mixture of 1 cup of bleach in 5 gallons of water. Then allow to air dry.
- Wear rubber boots, rubber gloves, and goggles when cleaning with bleach. Open windows and doors to get fresh air. Never mix bleach and ammonia. The fumes from the mixture could kill you. See also "Cleanup of Flood Water" at <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/floods/cleanupwater.asp> )

**Chemical Hazards.** Be aware of potential chemical hazards you may encounter during flood recovery. Flood waters may have buried or moved hazardous chemical containers of solvents or other industrial chemicals from their normal storage places.

- If any propane tanks (whether 20-lb. tanks from a gas grill or household propane tanks) are discovered, do not attempt to move them yourself. These represent a very real danger of fire or explosion, and if any are found, police or fire departments should be contacted immediately.
- Car batteries, even those in flood water, may still contain an electrical charge and should be removed with extreme caution by using insulated gloves. Avoid coming in contact with any acid that may have spilled from a damaged car battery.