

AFTER THE FLOOD - CLEAN AND SANITIZE TEXTILES IN YOUR HOME

When flood waters subside, the mess that remains may include bacteria, mold and mildew on hard surfaces and textiles in your home, an Iowa State University Extension specialist says.

“Floods are very difficult, both because of the loss and because of the mess that lingers afterward as a reminder,” says Jan Stone, extension textiles and clothing specialist. “You need to clean and sanitize.”

Sodium hypochlorite bleach – liquid chlorine bleach – is widely available and kills bacteria, mold and mildew, Stone says.

“The Iowa Department of Public Health recommends one-half cup of liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water for purposes of sanitation. It is the preferred chemical for sanitizing hard surfaces and most textiles in homes. However, it can change the color of many textile fibers. It is especially damaging to protein fibers such as wool and silk if it’s in prolonged contact.”

If possible, wear rubber gloves to reduce your health risk when handling clothing and textiles that have been submerged in sewage-contaminated water, Stone says.

Most clothes and washable textiles can be sanitized by washing with hot water and a heavy-duty detergent, bleaching with liquid chlorine bleach (one cup per wash load), and drying with high heat and ironing, Stone says. Non-colorfast items may fade or change color.

“If clothes are mud-soaked and wet, soak them in cold water before machine washing them in hot water. If muddy clothes have dried, brush off the crusty dirt before wetting them to wash them.”

What about dryclean-only clothing that gets wet by flooding? Rinse the garments in clear water if they’re still damp, then dry them out and take them to a drycleaner, Stone suggests. If the garments have dried with mud on them, brush off what you can, then take the garments to a drycleaner. Drycleaning and steam pressing will sanitize these items.

Mildew is a living organism that grows and will return in damp, warm conditions because spores float in the air more or less continually, Stone says. Mildew can be cleaned off floors and walls by scrubbing them down with detergent in hot water, then wiping them with a dilute bleach solution. Alcohol-based or ammonia-based cleaners also may be helpful, but watch out for fumes. Never mix bleach and ammonia-based cleaners – toxic fumes result. These fumes are especially hazardous in small, closed spaces such as bathrooms.

“Mildew can be prevented or minimized by cooler temperatures and dry atmospheres,” Stone says. “A light in a closet may be enough heat to dry the air and prevent mildew. It may help to run central air conditioning, a fan or dehumidifier until things get dried out in a home.”

Source: Iowa State University Extension Service