

FLOOD-SOAKED BEDDING NEEDS

SANITATION

Families cannot always move furnishings such as bedding out of danger of possible contamination from germ-laden floodwaters, said Lois Warme, Iowa State University Extension art and design specialist.

Many experiences of Iowa families over the years have shown that getting the family to safety, plus collecting some items of clothing and important family documents, must come first. When flood victims are worried about shutting off electricity and protecting appliances and major furnishings, they do not have much time to move other items.

Cleaning flood-soaked bedding is not quite the same as doing the regular family wash or the semi-yearly cleaning of blankets, Warme said. Laundry appliances in a flood-soaked home generally are not in working condition, or at least they need attention and thorough cleaning before laundering “as usual.”

Bedding may be cleaned in a commercial laundry, using the large front-loading machine. Do not overload a washer or dryer. Large or heavy loads need space to move freely in the washer and dryer.

Here are tips for reclaiming flood-soaked bedding, all with emphasis on thorough sanitation since floodwaters are filthy and germ-laden.

For all bedding: Hang out to air and dry thoroughly; then brush to remove excess dirt and soil.

Blankets: Put wool blankets through a dry-cleaning process either at a commercial dry-cleaning plant or at a coin-operated facility. Shrinkage and thorough cleaning make wool blankets difficult to wash. For blankets that are washable (rayon, acrylic, cotton), put them through two complete washing cycles. Air-dry or use an automatic dryer at proper temperature settings.

Sheets and pillow cases: Put through two complete washing cycles. Bleach using diluted liquid chlorine bleach to help kill germs. Follow your regular drying procedure.

Quilts and comforters: Wash or dry-clean depending on fiber content of the bedding. Usually, it’s best to wash cotton quilts.

Pillows: If pillows are foam rubber or stuffed with feathers or fiberfill, put them through a regular washing cycle using sudsy lukewarm water. Do not overload the machine. Two pillows usually make a normal load.

Check the ticking on the feather pillow to see if it is tight. If it is, do not take the feathers out of the pillow. If the ticking is worn, transfer the feathers to a muslin bag larger than the ticking. Sew up the bag, wash feathers in it; then dry, and put them back in the ticking.

Stop the washing process mid-way and turn the pillows over by hand. Plan to use a non-chlorine disinfectant in the wash or rinse water for pillows containing foam, down or feathers. Use bleach on fiberfill pillows.

Air-dry foam rubber pillows. There is danger of fire if they are put in an automatic dryer. Feather pillows may be dried in an automatic dryer at a low temperature setting or may be air-dried. Air-dried pillows can be fluffed up by hand as they are drying.

Do not wash kapok and cotton-filled pillows. The cotton filling will become lumpy because water disintegrates kapok. These pillows probably should not be reclaimed.

Mattresses: Foam-rubber and urethane-foam mattresses are mildew-proof and odorless. The cover can be removed and machine-washed (or you may want to discard it and buy a new cover). The foam mattress part can be thoroughly washed with a garden hose. Squeeze a detergent and water solution through the foam if possible.

Reconditioning of other types of mattresses is too difficult to do at home. For a good innerspring mattress, check with a nearby commercial renovating company to see if it is worth reclaiming. Check cost of renovation against replacement cost. As a general rule, inexpensive mattresses are not worth the expense of reclaiming and should be discarded.

Flood-Soaked Mattress Not Worth Saving

A cotton or foam rubber mattress badly soaked by flood water is hardly worth trying to recondition, said Lois Warne, Iowa State University Extension art and design specialist.

Reconditioning a mattress isn't a job that can be done with much success at home, Warne said. But if a new, good-quality mattress is damaged, you may wish to go to a mattress-renovating company and see what it would cost to have it reconditioned.

Upholstered box springs may not be worth the cost of new covering and padding materials. Decide if you can replace this padding yourself if the wooden frame is not too warped. If it needs to be done professionally, consider the cost.

Flood water damage to flat hide-a-bed and wire bed springs can be handled at home, Warne said. Leave the springs out in the sun and air to dry—after they have been cleaned thoroughly—until the odors are gone. Rub the clean, dry metal with a cloth moistened with paraffin oil. After that has dried completely, coat the metal with a suitable paint. Look for a paint that prevents rust.

The same treatment method will work for other metal furniture that may rust as a result of floodwater or dampness in storage buildings, Warne said.

Source: Iowa State University Extension Service