

Cleaning Mold, Mildew & Bacteria

Mold, mildew and bacteria are common after water damage. If unchecked they can lead to sanitation and health problems. The walls, floors, closets, shelves, contents-every flooded part of your house-should be thoroughly washed and disinfected.

In most cases, household cleaning products will do the job if you use them correctly. Check the label on the products to see how much to use. Some products shouldn't be used on certain materials; the label will tell you that. Apply cleaner and give it time to work before you mop or sponge it up. Follow directions and all safety precautions on the container. After cleaning a room or item, go over it again with a disinfectant to kill the germs and smell left by the floodwaters. You may also need to get rid of mildew, an unwelcome companion to moisture that shows as fuzzy splotches.

Cleaning tips

Tackle one room at a time. A two bucket approach is most efficient: use one bucket for rinse water and the other for the cleaner. Rinse out your sponge, mop, or cleaning cloth in the rinse bucket. Wring it as dry as possible and keep it rolled up tight as you put it in the cleaner bucket. Let it unroll to absorb the cleaner. Using two buckets keeps most of the dirty rinse water out of your cleaning solution. Replace the rinse water frequently.

Walls

Start cleaning a wall at the bottom or where the worst damage was. If you did not have to remove the wallboard or plaster, you may find it the wallboard or plaster won't come clean and you will want to replace it rather than clean it. If you have removed the wallboard or plaster, wash the studs and sills and disinfect them.

Furniture:

Solid wood furniture can usually be repaired and cleaned, but wood veneer often separates and warps. Wood alcohol or turpentine applied with a cotton ball may remove white mildew spots on wood. Cream wood restorers with lanolin will help restore good wooden furniture parts. Upholstered furniture soaks up contaminants from floodwaters and should be cleaned only by a professional. This is also true of carpets and bedding. Unless the piece is an antique or especially valuable, upholstered furniture soaked by floodwaters should probably be thrown out.

Cleaners

1st choice: Non-sudsing household cleaners
2nd Choice: Laundry soap or detergent

Disinfectants

1st choice: Commercial disinfectant or sanitizers, such as the quaternary, phenolic, or pine oil based ones. (Check labels for the contents).
2nd Choice: 1 Cup (8 ounces) of laundry bleach for 1 gallon of water.

Mildew Removers

1st choice: Commercial mildew removers or mildewcides.
2nd Choice: Washing soda or tri-sodium phosphate (available at grocery or paint stores). Use 5 tablespoons per gallon of water.
3rd Choice: 1 Cup (8 ounces) of laundry bleach for 1 gallon of water. See below on using bleach.

Bleach

Liquid chlorine bleach, such as Clorox or Purex bleach, can do a variety of flood clean up jobs. Make sure that 5.25% sodium hypochlorite is the only active ingredient. Bleach that has a scent added to improve its smell is available. Scented bleach is fine for cleanup jobs, but don't use it for treating drinking water. Don't use dry bleach or any bleach that does not contain chlorine. Be careful of fumes and wear rubber gloves, protective eye wear and mask. Do not mix bleach with other household chemical products, especially ammonia or toilet bowl cleaner; the chemical reaction can create a poisonous gas. Do not use bleach on aluminum or linoleum.