

NEWS FROM



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STATE OFFICIALS OFFER SAFETY TIPS AFTER HURRICANE IRENE

As millions of people across New York State continue to experience hardships in the wake of Hurricane Irene, State Emergency Management Office Director Andrew X. Feeney and State Health Commissioner Nirav R. Shah, M.D., M.P.H., today reminded New Yorkers that they should continue to think safety first.

“As you return home and engage in clean-up efforts, it is vital that you continue to use caution and follow common-sense guidance to keep you and your family safe,” Director Feeney said. “Think safety first. Remain alert to the hazards – some obvious, some hidden – that may be associated with storm-damaged areas.”

“The last thing we want is for anyone else to suffer illness or injury,” Dr. Shah added. “When you return home, take care to protect your health and safety. Think about your neighbors. If you know of someone with special needs, please check on them, if you can, in case they might need assistance.”

Feeney and Shah cautioned that recovering from a storm of this magnitude involves taking many special precautions, including the following:

After the storm:

- Advise interested parties (family, friends and co-workers) that you are safe.
- Obey all curfews and emergency orders that are issued. **DO NOT** enter evacuated areas until local officials have issued an “All Clear.” Stay away from disaster areas. Do not sightsee!
- If driving, use caution. Be aware of road and bridge washouts, and storm debris on roadways. Never drive through flooded roadways.

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- Avoid all downed power lines. Assume all have live electricity.
- Look for and report broken utility lines and damaged roadways and railways to appropriate authorities.
- Continue to monitor local media broadcasts and NOAA Weather Radio for the latest emergency information from local authorities.
- When helping injured or trapped persons, do not try to move the seriously injured unless they are in immediate danger of further injury.

If you are returning home:

- Stay out of damaged buildings and return home only when authorities say it is safe.
- Beware of structural damage. Roofs and floors may be weakened and need repair. When entering a fire-damaged building, look for signs of heat or smoke.
- Check the building foundation, chimney, and surrounding land for damage.
- Turn off any outside gas lines at the meter or tank. Let the building air out to remove foul odors or escaping gas.
- Upon entering the building, use a battery-powered flashlight. Do not use an open flame as a source of light—some gas may still be trapped inside.
- When inspecting the building, wear heavy-soled rubber boots and gloves. Watch for electrical shorts and live wires before making certain the main power switch is off.
- Have electric, gas, and water connections checked before turning them back on.
- Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, or gasoline or other flammable liquids immediately. Leave area immediately if you smell gas or chemical fumes.
- Take extra precautions to prevent fire. Lowered pressure in water mains may make firefighting extremely difficult.
- Contact your local disaster relief service, such as the American Red Cross or Salvation Army, if you need housing, food, or personal items that were destroyed.
- Take pictures of damages, keep records of all clean up and repair costs, and report to your insurance company.
- Do not throw away any damaged goods until an official inventory has been taken.

Food safety:

- Check for spoilage before using food from refrigerator or ice chest: “When in doubt, throw it out!”
- Refrigerated foods can also be unsafe. If food is still frozen, then it is ok to use.
- Commercially canned food should be discarded if there is bulging or if it is open.
- Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if you remove the labels and then disinfect the cans in a bleach solution. Use 1/4 cup of bleach in one gallon of water; re-label cans and include expiration date and type of food.
- Infants should be fed only pre-mixed canned baby formula.
- Throw out medicine or food that has had contact with floodwaters.

Water safety:

- Test drinking water for potability. Wells should be pumped out and water tested for drinking.
- Use your emergency supply or boil water before using until there is official word that the water is safe.
- If the public water system is declared unsafe by health officials, water for drinking and cooking should be boiled vigorously for 10 minutes.

Prevent illness by practicing good sanitation and hygiene:

- Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected before eating and after toilet use, cleanup activities or handling items contaminated by floodwater or sewage.
- Floodwaters may contain fecal matter from sewage systems, agricultural and industrial waste, and septic tanks. If you have open cuts or sores exposed to the floodwater, keep them as clean as possible by washing them with soap and disinfected or boiled water. Apply antibiotic ointment to reduce the risk of infection.
- Do not allow children to play in floodwater or with toys that are contaminated by floodwater.
- If floodwaters are covering your septic tank and leach field, you should not use any flush toilets attached to the system.

Prevent mold growth:

- Moisture that enters buildings from leaks or flooding accelerates mold growth. Molds can cause disease, trigger allergic reactions and continue to damage materials after the storm.
- Remove standing water from your home or office. Remove wet materials promptly and ventilate; use fans and dehumidifiers if possible.
- If mold growth has already occurred, it is best to have a professional remove it.
- Individuals with known mold allergies or asthma should never clean or remove mold.
- Be careful about mixing household cleaners and disinfectants, as combining certain types of products can produce toxic fumes and result in injury or death.

Household cleaning tips:

- Walls, hard-surfaced floors and many other household surfaces must be cleaned with soap and water and disinfected with a solution of one (1) cup of bleach to five (5) gallons of water.
- Thoroughly disinfect surfaces that come in contact with food and children's play areas.
- Wash all linens and clothing in hot water or dry-clean.
- Items that cannot be washed or dry-cleaned, such as mattresses and upholstered furniture, must be air dried in the sun and sprayed thoroughly with a disinfectant.

- Steam-clean all carpeting.
- Replace fiberboard, insulation and disposable filters in your heating/cooling system.
- Wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during clean-up.
- It can be difficult to throw away items in a home, particularly those with sentimental value. However, keeping certain items soaked by sewage or floodwaters may be unhealthy. Materials that cannot be thoroughly cleaned and dried within 24-48 hours should be discarded.

Garbage storage, collection and disposal:

- As you start cleaning, you will likely produce a great deal of garbage. Local authorities will tell you where and when collection will occur. Garbage invites insects and rodents. Rodents, in particular, may be looking for food because the flood may have destroyed their homes and normal food source.
- Store any garbage in watertight, rodent/insect-proof containers with tight-fitting covers. Use plastic liners if available.
- Put garbage in a convenient location but not near your well.
- Heavy rains and flooding can lead to an increase in mosquitoes that may be infected with West Nile virus. To protect against mosquitoes, remain diligent in your personal mosquito protection efforts. Avoid being outdoors when mosquitoes are most active. For many species, this is during the dusk and dawn hours.

Tips to avoid mosquito-borne diseases after the storm:

- Wear clothing that covers most of your skin.
- Repellents containing DEET (N,N-diethyl-m-toluamide), picaridin or OLE (oil of lemon eucalyptus) are options. Use strictly according to label instructions. Do not allow children to apply repellents and avoid applying repellents to the hands of young children.
- Check around your home to rid the area of standing water.
- Eliminate other breeding sites—remove old tires and turn over or remove empty plastic containers.

For additional information, please contact your local health department or visit www.dhSES.ny.gov or www.health.ny.gov.

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