

Cleaning Clothing and Linens Contaminated by Floodwater

Overview

Flood waters may contain sewage and other things that cause bacteria to grow and spread. To help prevent mold and mildew growth, as well as decreasing the chances of a possible bacterial infection, clothing contaminated by flood water should be cleaned as soon as possible.

If the washer was affected by flood waters

It is important to first decide if the washer is safe to use by having the machine checked by a professional. Before you use the washer for any clothing or linens, run the machine through one full cycle using hot water and a disinfectant or sanitizer.

Clothing and linens to be thrown away

All clothing and linens that will be thrown away can be placed in a plastic bag and sealed. Follow local recommendations for disposing of flood contaminated items.

Clothing and linens that can be saved

Machine washable clothing and linens contaminated by flood water should be washed separately from uncontaminated clothing and linens. Clothing or linens contaminated with dried mud or dirt should be taken outdoors and shaken to remove as much mud and dirt as possible before washing. Clothing or linens contaminated with wet or damp mud should be hosed off or soaked in cold water and liquid detergent before washing to help prevent clogging the washer drain.

Wash the clothing or linens in hot water, heavy-duty detergent, and bleach to fight any bacterial contamination. For colored clothing or linens use color safe bleach. Follow detergent and bleach product instructions for how much to use. Once the clothing or linens have been washed, place in the dryer on the highest heat recommended for the fabric. Clothes or linens can also be hung outside in the sun to dry. Clothes should be completely dry before putting away to prevent additional mold or mildew growth.

Cleaning up after handling contaminated items

Clean every surface that the contaminated clothing and linens have come in contact with. Wash your hands and arms with warm soapy water.

Resources

EPA: [Flooded Homes – Debris Removal After a Flood \(Video\)](#)

National Park Service (NPS): [Preservation Matters – Disasters – Saving Wet Textiles After a Flood](#)