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Health and Safety in a Flood Emergency

Spring heralds the arrival of warmth and beauty to New York State. But it also brings one of the most common and widespread emergencies – flooding.

Whether caused by spring rains or melting winter snow and ice thaws, water damage in your home can create serious health and safety concerns. Standing water and excessive moisture can lead to the growth of bacteria, mold and insects. After a flood, you must take precautions to protect your family from developing illnesses associated with contaminated water, food and air. It is critical to practice basic hygiene during the emergency period. Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected.

The Otsego County Dept of Health offers the following advice to help keep homes and families healthy during and after a flood:

WATER

- Listen to and follow public service announcements to learn whether the community water supply is safe to drink and use.
- If the water is not safe, use bottled water, or boil or disinfect water for cooking, cleaning or bathing until tap water is safe again.

FOODS

- Discard frozen foods that may have thawed during a power outage.
- Raw foods exposed to flood waters should be avoided because of possible contamination. If raw foods must be used, clean thoroughly and rinse with chlorinated water (two teaspoons of liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water).
- Destroy the contents of crown-capped bottles and foods in glass jars. Their food-safety seals may have been broken. Destroy canned foods when swelling, rusting or serious denting is visible.

- Cook all foods thoroughly. Frozen foods that have been thawed should be discarded if not consumed immediately, unless you are sure they have been kept refrigerated at 45 degrees Fahrenheit or lower.

HOUSEHOLD CLEAN-UP

- Power should be turned off in cellars before flooding. If possible, wait for ground waters to drop below floor level before going into the cellar. Otherwise, drain or pump water from flooded cellars. Wash down the walls, floors and other areas exposed to flood waters. Keep windows and doors open for ventilation. Disinfect the washed areas by applying a solution of bleach with a broom. The solution is prepared by adding four tablespoons of bleach to five gallons of water. Allow the solution to remain on the surface for about 10 minutes. Rinse with cold water as soon as possible to minimize staining. You may also use a commercial disinfectant.
- Furniture: Clean and then wash metal and leather surfaces with mild soap and water and wipe dry immediately. Some upholstery may be washed on the surface with soap and water and wiped dry. Expose to open air and sunshine.
- Floor coverings: Flush rugs and carpets with a hose and squeegee, then wash with lukewarm water containing a detergent. Rinse and dry in sun.

SAFETY

- Rubber gloves should be worn while scrubbing damaged interiors with a bleach solution.
- Don't neglect supposedly minor cuts, scratches or other injuries or sickness experienced during the emergency.

For more information, Sue Smith recommends the New York State Department of Health brochure *Don't Be Left in the Dark* (#7064) which can be ordered by writing Publications, Box 2000, Albany, NY 12220.

For more information, visit on-line at www.nyhealth.gov or call:

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