

# Cleaning up after an emergency

Here are a few suggestions to help you clean-up safely.

## Bushfire

If your home smells of smoke from bushfires you should:

- Open up your house to sunlight and fresh air to ventilate
- Wash floors, walls and furniture
- Air soft furnishings outside in the wind.

The fact sheet 'Cleaning up a smoke affected home' provides further advice.

## Flood and storm

Mould and rising damp are common problems in homes after a flood or storm surge has entered the home. Mould can trigger nasal congestion, sneezing and coughing, wheezing, respiratory infections and worsen asthma and allergic conditions.

Before cleaning the mould, you need to reduce moisture and humidity levels in the home by opening doors and windows to ventilate the home.

The fact sheet 'Mould and your health' provides further advice.

## Further information

The fact sheets mentioned in this brochure and other fact sheets are available on:

[www.health.vic.gov.au/emergency](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/emergency)

Your health and safety: during and after an emergency

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Information, advice and support to  
help you recover from emergencies

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Natural emergencies can pose a risk to your health, whether you're affected by a flood, bushfire or storm. This brochure provides some general information about potential hazards during and after an emergency.

## During a flood or storm

People risk their lives by trying to travel through floodwaters. Injury or death might occur from drowning, or sustaining heavy blows to the body and head while being swept along by the current.

Quick life-saving facts:

- Floodwaters are often deeper than they look. Never walk, swim or drive through floodwaters, especially if you can see a current.
- Do not assume that good swimming skills will keep you safe. Swirling objects in the floodwaters, such as tree branches, could strike you.
- If your vehicle is overcome by water, leave it and move to higher ground immediately.
- Try to keep dry. Being wet and cold for any length of time could lower your body temperature and lead to hypothermia.
- Be aware that downed power lines pose a risk of electrocution.

## During a bushfire

Bushfire smoke can reduce the quality of air in city and country areas and could affect your health.

Quick tips to protect your health:

- Avoid physical activity, particularly if you have a pre-existing lung or heart condition.
- If you have asthma follow your personal asthma plan
- If you have a lung or heart condition follow your treatment plan
- Stay indoors when smoke is in the air
- Take air-conditioned breaks at a community library or shopping centre.

## Power blackouts

Severe weather events often result in power outages. It is important to be aware of the risk to your health and safety caused by not using alternative power sources safely.

Power generators can be useful, however, if not used safely can lead to electrocution, fire or carbon monoxide poisoning from the engine exhaust.

**Follow the user directions supplied with the generator to ensure safe use.**

## Returning home after a flood, storm or bushfire

When returning to your home after a flood, storm or bushfire there are a number of hazards to be aware of.

- Be aware that wild animals including rodents, snakes or spiders may be trapped in your home shed or garden. Avoid wild or stray animals. Contact your local council, animal shelter or vet for advice.
- Be aware that damaged copper chrome arsenate (CCA) treated timber might contain arsenic and other hazardous chemicals. Do not allow children or animals to play in the ash. Contact your council for advice on CCA treated timber ash disposal.
- All food that has been fire or flood damaged should be discarded – this includes canned and packaged foods.
- Septic tanks might have been weakened by fire or flood, so do not drive or walk over them. Contact a licenced plumber to have your tank assessed if you suspect any damage.
- Water tanks might contain smoke, ash debris or dead animals. If your tank water tastes, smells or looks unusual do not drink it or give it to animals.