



# Flooded Food Establishments

## Frequently Asked Questions

Flood waters can contain rotting food, feces, chemicals, and disease-causing organisms which can contaminate your food establishment and easily cause foodborne **illnesses**. Avoid skin contact with flood water as it should be treated as sewage.

### First Steps

#### **WHAT SHOULD THE FOOD ESTABLISHMENT DO FIRST?**

Call utility companies to assure the safety of gas and electrical lines and determine that the building is safe to enter. Do not attempt to conduct any food-related operations including the cleaning of equipment and utensils.

#### **DOES THE HOUSTON HEALTH DEPARTMENT NEED TO BE NOTIFIED?**

Yes. Notify the Houston Health Department Bureau of Consumer Health Services (BCHS) at [chs@houstontx.gov](mailto:chs@houstontx.gov), or [www.houstonconsumer.org](http://www.houstonconsumer.org) that one or more imminent health hazards exists (flood, electrical outage, water outage, sewage-water backflow, etc.).

#### **WHAT IF ONLY PART OF THE ESTABLISHMENT FLOODED?**

Operations may continue in an area of your establishment that is unaffected by flooding or structural damage. There must be complete separation between the affected and unaffected areas to ensure that cross-contamination does not occur.

#### **ARE PERMITS NEEDED TO REPAIR THE ESTABLISHMENT OR REPLACE EQUIPMENT?**

Yes. Contact the Houston Permitting Center (HPC) at (832) 394-8810; 1002 Washington, Houston, 77002; 8 AM - 4:30 PM when replacing large floor-mounted equipment, repairing or replacing interior surfaces, or repairing, replacing, or remodeling the facility's structure.

HPC will work with you to re-open your business as quickly as possible. You will need to repair any damage swiftly and correctly. Please note that failure to follow the required procedures may result in having the work redone or result in costly issues such as mold removal. Requirements to re-open will be dependent upon the extent of damage and the amount of work done. Refer to [Recovering from Flood and/or Structural Damage](#) for more information.

### Cleaning

#### **SHOULD A COMPANY BE HIRED TO CLEAN UP AFTER THE FLOODING OR CAN THE ESTABLISHMENT'S EMPLOYEES DO IT?**

Consider hiring professionals to remove health threats caused by mold, asbestos, harmful vapors, disease-causing organisms, chemicals, and other hazardous materials and/or a professional water-damage restoration company for widespread damage.

#### **IF EMPLOYEES ARE INVOLVED IN THE CLEANUP, HOW CAN THEY BE PROTECTED?**

Provide Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that consists of eye protection, rubber boots, and gloves that can be washed and disinfected after use, protective clothing (coveralls or long-sleeved shirts and long pants or disposable outerwear), and an N-95 filtration mask fitted to the individual if removing mold. Provide safety training for the

removal of mold and use of chemicals and sanitizers [Protect Employees Involved in the Cleanup](#).

***Always use appropriate PPE to enter and clean a flooded establishment.***

## **WHAT ARE THE FIRST STEPS TO RESTORING THE ESTABLISHMENT TO PRE-DISASTER CONDITIONS?**

Rid your physical facility of heavy filth, water, and damaged items.

## **WHAT DO I NEED BEFORE I CAN START CLEANING THE FACILITY AND EQUIPMENT?**

The water supply must be safe, the wastewater system must be functioning, and electricity must be available for heating water and providing sufficient lighting for cleaning.

## **WHAT FOOD AND EQUIPMENT CAN BE KEPT AND WHAT SHOULD BE DISCARDED?**

Refer to the [Food and Equipment Salvage Chart](#) to determine what food, equipment, utensils, furnishings, and single-service articles must be discarded and what items may be kept.

## **DO I NEED TO KEEP ANY RECORDS OF FOOD THAT WILL BE DISCARDED?**

If cleanup begins before a BCHS health officer arrives, document the type and pounds of food discarded and the method of disposal. Keep the records for health inspection and insurance purposes.

## **WHAT DO I DO WITH RUINED EQUIPMENT AND DISCARDED FOOD?**

Refer to [Proper Disposal of Contaminated Food](#) for:

- Identification and separation of temperature-abused and contaminated food
- Methods for handling small and large volumes of food
- How additional waste will be handled
- Information regarding the sale of distressed (contaminated) food to licensed food salvage establishments

## **HOW DO I CLEAN AND DISINFECT AFFECTED HARD SURFACES AND EQUIPMENT?**

Refer to [Clean, Repair, and Disinfect Affected Equipment and Hard Surfaces](#).

## **HOW DO I CLEAN AND DISINFECT COOKWARE, TABLEWARE, AND UTENSILS?**

Refer to [Clean and Disinfect All Affected Cookware, Tableware, and Utensils](#).

## **HOW DO I CLEAN AND DISINFECT EQUIPMENT WITH WATER CONNECTIONS?**

Refer to [Use This Checklist for Water-Use Equipment](#).

## **WHAT IS AN APPROVED DISINFECTANT AND HOW MUCH SHOULD BE USED?**

An [EPA-registered disinfectant against Norovirus](#) following manufacturer's directions, should be used. Some disinfectants such as bleach may be used at different concentrations for disinfection and sanitization.

## **CAN A DISINFECTANT BE USED ON FOOD-CONTACT SURFACES?**

Disinfection requires a higher concentration of disinfectant than what is used for the routine sanitization of equipment and utensils. Do not use disinfectant solution on food-contact surfaces unless the surfaces have been contaminated with flood water. Ensure disinfected food-contact surfaces are rinsed thoroughly of the disinfectant solution and then sanitized (50-100 ppm chlorine) before using. (Chlorine bleach may be used for both disinfecting and sanitizing.)

## **WHAT SAFETY MEASURES SHOULD BE TAKEN IF CHLORINE BLEACH IS USED AS A DISINFECTANT?**

- Follow the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) for chlorine bleach. The high concentration of chlorine bleach in disinfectant solutions is toxic and can be harmful to eyes, skin, and airways.
- Use chlorine bleach in a well-ventilated area and wear PPE such as goggles/face shields, masks, and disposable gloves aprons/gowns, and shoe coverings.

- Do not mix bleach with ammonia.

### **WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR ON THE LABEL OF A BLEACH BOTTLE?**

The bleach should contain a sodium hypochlorite concentration of 5-6% or 8.25%. Do not use expired, scented, or splashless bleach.

### **WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE FOR DISINFECTING WITH BLEACH?**

Refer to [Disinfection After a Flood or Sewage Backup](#).

### **HOW DO I DISINFECT FABRICS, CARPETS, AND OTHER SURFACES THAT MAY BE PERMANENTLY STAINED BY BLEACH?**

Steam cleaning may be a preferable alternative.

### **WHAT SHOULD I DO WITH A FLOODED WALK-IN COOLER?**

Refer to [Walk-In Cooler Restoration After a Flood](#).

### **ARE FLOODED GREASE TRAPS A CAUSE FOR CONCERN?**

Yes. Use a permitted transporter to service a flooded grease trap.

### **SHOULD CLEANING TOOLS BE DISCARDED?**

Yes. Discard contaminated linens and clothing affected by flood water or used during cleanup **OR** use a commercial laundry service that can properly disinfect the items. Discard mop heads and any cleaning tools that contacted flood water.

### **WHAT MEASURES SHOULD BE TAKEN FOR PEST CONTROL?**

Establishments can expect an increase in insects and rodents after a major storm or flood. Expect to replace traps, bait stations, and treatments that may have been displaced or damaged and to add other equipment to minimize the invasion of pests. Dispose of contaminated or spoiled solid foods in closed containers to prevent rodent and fly harborage. Seal all openings into the facility. Clear trash and debris immediately in and around your establishment (downed tree limbs, cardboard boxes, broken sheetrock, old equipment, and any other damaged materials).

## **Resuming Normal Operations**

### **HOW DO I RECEIVE APPROVAL TO RESUME FOOD OPERATIONS?**

- Meet the [Requirements to Resume Normal Operations](#).
- **To request approval to resume normal operations** contact BCHS at [www.houstonconsumer.org](http://www.houstonconsumer.org), [chs@houstontx.gov](mailto:chs@houstontx.gov), or (832) 393-5100.
- **To request a pre-opening inspection if permits and approval were needed from the Houston Permitting Center** contact BCHS at (832) 393-5100 or [CHS@houstontx.gov](mailto:CHS@houstontx.gov).

### **THE BUREAU OF CONSUMER HEALTH SERVICES MUST GRANT APPROVAL FOR YOUR ESTABLISHMENT TO RESUME FOOD OPERATIONS.**

For more information, refer to [What to do When your Establishment Floods](#).

Please contact the Bureau of Consumer Health Services (BCHS) with any questions or concerns.

4/26/21



**HOUSTON HEALTH DEPARTMENT**  
8000 North Stadium Drive, Houston TX 77054  
832-393-5100  
[CHS@houstontx.gov](mailto:CHS@houstontx.gov)  
[HOUSTONCONSUMER.ORG](http://HOUSTONCONSUMER.ORG)

