

Memo from Te Whatu Ora – Health New Zealand, Te Matau a Maui Hawke’s Bay Public Health Service

24/02/2023

RE: Key public health considerations for Educational Settings before re-opening post flooding events

Remember: Flood water can contain lots of contaminants such as sewage, viruses, bacteria, parasites and chemicals that could make you unwell.

- Cover any cuts or wounds before you start cleaning up to help protect you from contaminants.
- Remember good hand washing and drying during the clean-up process.
- If possible, wear cleaning gloves, sturdy shoes and protective clothing. Wear a mask to protect yourself from dust when cleaning up silt, mud and soil. Wear a P2 or N95 mask for best protection, a surgical mask will still help.
- Shoes should be worn in outside areas for at least 14 days following the clean-up of flooded outside areas.

Sanitary services

Ensure the buildings have adequate facilities to maintain a good level of hygiene. They must have running potable (safe) water, flushing toilets, and hand washing facilities for children and adults. Check there is not a boil water notice in place on your supply by checking with your local council. Ensure that water taps on town supply are flushed until water is running clear. If the water supply is sourced from a private supply (i.e. roof, bore, spring) and you have concerns about it you should contact your local Council for advice.

Indoor environments

Flood affected buildings should not be used until they can be adequately dried out and checked. For guidance on the remediation of affected buildings see www.branz.co.nz/pubs/bulletins/bu666/

Hard surfaces (such as floors, walls, tables, chairs) should be scrubbed first with clean water and dishwashing liquid to remove all visible dirt. Then wipe down with a household bleach mix. (please see attached instructions on how to make this up)

Thoroughly wash and disinfect all soft furnishings, and dry in the sunshine. Get rid of items that cannot be cleaned and disinfected. Large items such as mattresses and carpets that have been soaked in flood waters should be discarded.

Ventilate and air out all the classrooms well prior to re-opening.

Outdoor environments

It is assumed flood waters are contaminated with sewage. Cleaning of any flooded outdoor areas is therefore very important. If there is no time to remediate any outdoor areas before opening, these must be cordoned off to restrict access. To remediate any flood affected playing fields or playgrounds:

- Erect signs and barriers to exclude people and pets
- Depending on the severity of the flooding, use a specialist waste contractor to remove gross solids and as much liquid as possible and dilute spill if possible.

- All sand and bark from children's play areas should be removed and disposed of. Check with your council on the correct place to dispose of this. Replace with clean material.
- Check any manufacturer's instructions regarding the cleaning of any turf/matting and follow these. In the absence of any instructions, remove and replace any turf/matting if possible as this is the only way to guarantee that it is safe and free from contamination. It is not possible to test turf to ensure that it is completely free of contaminants, and further rainfall could cause residual contamination to rise to the surface and create a risk.

After floods, a garden hose is useful for washing down the outside of the property to remove silt, salt deposits and fine debris, but do not use high-pressure hoses as they can blast contaminated matter into the air. Please follow any local water restriction advice in place at the time.

Remove all moveable equipment in the affected area (e.g. outdoor furniture, play equipment) to a restricted area until it has been scrubbed with water and detergent, disinfected with diluted bleach (please see attached instructions on how to make this up) and thoroughly dried (at least 24 hours).

Clean surfaces as much as possible by scrubbing with water and detergent before disinfection with household bleach mix (please see attached instructions on how to make this up). Residual organic matter will reduce the effectiveness of the disinfectant.

Restrict access to playground areas until the surface water has disappeared and the area has dried out completely. Sprinkle the area with garden lime if available. It is recommended that shoes are worn in these areas for at least 14 days after the ground has dried out completely.

Garden produce and Food Safety

If you have a vegetable garden or fruit trees at your centre, dispose of the vegetables or fruit that has been submerged or splashed by floodwater.

Replace the soil if possible.

Hand washing, hand washing, hand washing

Once you re-open please remember to continue to emphasise the importance of good hand hygiene amongst all staff and children. It is a critical time to be vigilant with this as we may see an increase in gastrointestinal, respiratory and skin illnesses in our communities.

Wash hands for 20 seconds under clean running water and dry hands thoroughly. Liquid soap and warm water are best. Use hand sanitisers if these are able to be accessed.

For any further advice please phone 06 8788109, ask for the on-call Health Protection Office or phone Liz Read, Public Health Nurse Manager, Te Whatu Ora, Te Matau a Māui Hawke's Bay on 027 233 0219. Alternatively, please email the Health Protection Team on PH_Emergency_Notifications@hbdhb.govt.nz

Making up a diluted bleach solution

- Diluted bleach solutions **must be made up fresh each day**, labelled appropriately, and kept out of direct sunlight.
- Plain, unscented, household bleaches should be used. These are sold in different strengths of sodium hypochlorite (usually 2 - 5%) which is written on the label.
- Supermarket bleach usually has a concentration of approximately 4% (40 g/L). Ensure that this is checked prior to making up a bleach solution. Also check that the bottle is not past its use-by date.
- Use a measuring cup to make up the recommended bleach solution, following the instructions in the table below. Please label the container and store appropriately.

0.5% hypochlorite

Strength of bleach		Quantity of bleach	Quantity of water	Total volume of diluted solution
% hypochlorite	g/100ml hypochlorite			
0.5%	0.5 g/100ml	Use undiluted	Nil	Use undiluted
2%	2 g/100ml	100 ml	300 ml	400 ml
3%	3 g/100ml	50 ml	250 ml	300 ml
4%	4 g/100ml	50 ml	350 ml	400 ml
5%	5 g/100ml	50 ml	450 ml	500 ml