

Advice for Customers who have Suffered Flooding



We are sorry that you have recently suffered from flooding to your home or garden. The Water Research Centre (WRC), a long established and internationally recognised independent research company, has undertaken scientific investigations into the biological effects of sewage flooding.

The work was commissioned by government regulators and several water and sewerage companies, including Northern Ireland Water.

The information is based both on the advice of experts and the research looking into the effects of sewage flooding.

It explains how to deal with the situation and answers the most frequently asked questions.



Contents

- Health precautions
- Internal flooding to buildings
- Flooding to gardens
- Reducing flood damage

Health precautions

Does sewage flooding pose a health risk?

Sewage largely consists of water and domestic waste from bathrooms and kitchens. During wet weather it is likely to be highly diluted by rainwater.

Providing that you adopt normal basic hygiene precautions and follow the instructions in this leaflet, you are unlikely to be at any increased health risk. Basic hygiene precautions should include:

- Washing hands after exposure
- Decontaminating footwear by washing and treating with a mild disinfectant
- Keeping children and pets out of the contaminated area

However, in the unlikely event of you feeling unwell, we recommend you visit your GP as a precautionary measure and explain that your property has recently been flooded.

If you have any further concerns?

If, after reading this leaflet, you have any further concern please contact Northern Ireland Water on **08457 44088**.

Customers who have suffered property flooding

How will the contamination to my house be cleaned up?

Where appropriate Northern Ireland Water representatives will carry out an initial decontamination. Typically, this could consist of:

- Removing excess liquid (pumping/sweeping, as appropriate)
- A thorough clean up to remove any debris or faecal contamination
- Leaving the contaminated areas to dry
- Applying a mild disinfectant

The WRC tests have established that by using the above approach disinfection should remove all traces of bacteria within 24 to 48 hours.

Insurance

We recommend you first contact your insurance company if items have been damaged and need further cleansing or replacement and take advice from them. For example, some insurers may require photographic or other evidence before damaged items are removed.

Will the electricity circuits be safe?

If any electricity circuit or equipment has been immersed, a qualified electrician will need to check the safety of the system and appliances. Northern Ireland Electricity can be contacted to provide advice to customers on 08457 643643.

What precautions do I need to take to prevent further contamination in my house?

You need to follow these simple rules:

- Do not wipe over the disinfected areas as this will reduce the effectiveness of the disinfectant
- Where possible, windows should be opened to remove disinfectant odours
- Do not turn your heating up to dry the property as higher room temperatures may prolong the life of the bacteria

What happens next if my house has been flooded?

If you need to enter affected rooms in the 48 hours following the initial clean up, you are advised to adopt normal basic hygiene precautions such as not touching your mouth, washing your hands afterwards, etc.

After this time the bacteria in your home will have reverted to the normal background levels to be found elsewhere in houses unaffected by flooding.

Customers who have suffered external/garden flooding

How will the contamination to my garden be cleaned up?

Representatives of Northern Ireland Water will carry out a clean up. Excess liquid will be removed. This will be followed by a litter pick of solids and debris.

Lawns/borders

It is not normal practice to apply disinfectant to gardens as this can kill plants and do more harm than good. However, if you feel this would give you extra reassurance, then a very mild disinfectant can be applied.

Laboratory testing has shown the best long term treatment is to allow nature to take its course. As most contaminants will be at or near the surface, this will produce the maximum exposure to the sunlight's ultra violet (UV) radiation which is very effective in killing bacteria.

If the ground is particularly waterlogged, Northern Ireland Water may decide to leave the clean up for a day or two to avoid disturbing the ground and spreading the contamination.

Hard surfaces

Hard surfaces such as paths and drives will be cleaned and disinfected. We suggest you keep off these areas for 3 hours to give the disinfectant time to take effect.

What precautions do I need to take to prevent further contamination of my garden?

It is important that you do not attempt to dig or rake the affected area. This will spread the contamination further into the soil or turf, where lack of sunlight and the damp conditions will enhance the life of the bacteria.

Similarly you should not attempt to hose the garden down as this will saturate the ground and prolong the life of the bacteria.

What happens next if my garden has been flooded?

The bacterial contamination will die off naturally during the days following the flooding. After an appropriate quarantine period your garden should be safe to resume normal activities.

Factors which influence bacteria decay periods include climatic conditions such as temperature and moisture, vegetation, soil type, etc. Independent laboratory tests carried out by WRc show that bacteria should reduce to background levels in typically the following period:

- 9 days during warm, dry summer conditions
- 20 days during damper, cooler spring/autumnal conditions
- 25 days during wet, cold winter conditions

After this period has expired, the bacteria in your garden should have reverted to the normal levels to be found elsewhere in neighbouring gardens.

Reducing Flood Damage

The information below may enable you to reduce the impact of flooding on your home or business

- Keep a list of useful numbers to hand eg: flood emergency numbers, your local council, emergency services, your insurance company
- Make sure you know where to turn off your electricity and/or gas
- Make sure you have current insurance to cover against flood damage to your property
- If you are aware that your property may be at risk of flooding, have a few sandbags or floorboards prepared to block doorways and airbricks
- Ensure drains on your property are properly maintained
- Do not dump material into watercourses or public drains as this may lead to blockages and flooding
- Private gullies should be kept free of fallen leaves as they can cause temporary blockages
- Think about your car. Where could you move it to in the event of a flood?

Contact us:

You can contact Waterline on 08457 440088

Text phone for customers with hearing
difficulties 08457 023206

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