

EMERGENCY TOILET AND SANITATION WITHOUT RUNNING WATER

Keep garbage bags, plastic ties, moist towelettes, toilet paper, soap, and hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Wash hands with soap and safe water at key times, and follow your local officials on toilet use and waste disposal when water or sewer service is out.

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When the water or sewer is out, or you are sheltering in place for days, two things keep a household healthy: clean hands and contained waste. CDC's hygiene guidance puts the stakes plainly: "Even a microscopic amount of poop can contain millions of germs" (CDC).

SANITATION SUPPLIES TO KEEP

Ready.gov's basic disaster supplies kit includes "moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties (for personal sanitation)." Its list of additional supplies adds:

- Soap, hand sanitizer, and disinfecting wipes to disinfect surfaces
- Feminine supplies and personal hygiene items
- Infant formula, bottles, diapers, wipes, and diaper rash cream

FEMA's booklet Food and Water in an Emergency lists "sanitation and hygiene items (hand sanitizer, moist towelettes, and toilet paper)" in its basic kit.

WATER FOR HYGIENE

Plan water for washing, not only drinking. Ready.gov recommends at least one gallon of water per person per day for several days, "for drinking and sanitation." CDC notes that when power goes out, water purification systems may not be functioning fully, and that safe water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene includes bottled, boiled, or treated water.

FEMA warns not to use water from toilet flush tanks or bowls as a source of drinking water. For storing and treating water, see emergency water.

HANDWASHING WITHOUT RUNNING WATER

CDC says to wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially at key times. Use water that has been boiled or disinfected if local authorities or your doctor recommend extra caution. CDC also says that during a boil water advisory or “do not drink water” advisory, it may be safe to wash hands with tap water; follow your local water utility.

If clean tap water is not available, CDC says to create a temporary handwashing station using a large water jug.

CDC’s handwashing steps are: wet your hands with clean, running water (warm or cold), turn off the tap, and apply soap. Then lather, scrub for at least 20 seconds, rinse well under clean, running water, and dry with a clean towel or air dryer.

Key times to wash hands

From CDC:

- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before and after eating
- Before and after caring for someone at home who is sick with vomiting or diarrhea
- Before and after treating a cut or wound
- After using the toilet
- After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- After touching an animal, animal feed, or animal waste
- After handling pet food or pet treats
- After touching garbage

When to use hand sanitizer

If you do not have soap and water, CDC says to use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. CDC also says sanitizers do not eliminate all types of germs, might not remove harmful chemicals, and are not as effective when hands are visibly dirty or greasy (CDC).

EMERGENCY TOILET SUPPLIES

Keep these with your kit for personal sanitation if you cannot flush:

- Heavy-duty garbage bags and plastic ties, which Ready.gov lists “for personal sanitation” (Ready.gov)
- Toilet paper, moist towelettes, and hand sanitizer (FEMA)

- Soap, for handwashing with safe water (see above)

Do not let garbage build up inside, “both for fire and sanitation reasons” (Ready.gov). Where bagged waste can go depends on your local disposal rules, so follow instructions from local officials.

IF YOU HAVE A SEPTIC SYSTEM

For septic systems after a flood, EPA says:

- “Do not use the sewage system until water in the soil absorption field is lower than the water level around the house.”
- If possible, do not use the system if the soil is saturated and flooded.
- Sewage can back up into the home, and “the only way to prevent this backup is to relieve pressure on the system by using it less.” EPA’s advice is to plug all drains in the basement and drastically reduce water use in the house.
- If the system has electrical or mechanical parts that could have flooded, examine all electrical connections for damage before restoring electricity.

BATHING, TEETH, AND WOUNDS

CDC guidance on personal hygiene in an emergency:

- **Bathing:** Follow local guidance on water that is safe for bathing. If you bathe in water that is not safe to drink, be careful not to swallow any water or get it in your eyes. Do not bathe in water that may be contaminated with sewage or toxic chemicals, or in rivers, streams, or lakes contaminated by floodwater, sewage, or animal waste.
- **Teeth:** Use only clean water to brush your teeth after a water-related emergency, and listen to local authorities on whether tap water is safe.
- **Wounds:** Keep open wounds as clean as possible by washing well with soap and clean water, and cover them with a waterproof bandage. Avoid contact with floodwater if you have an open wound. Seek immediate medical care if a wound develops redness, swelling, or oozing.

DIAPERS AND MENSTRUAL SUPPLIES

CDC says it is always important to change diapers in a safe, germ-free way, “but an emergency can make this difficult.” Wash your hands after every diaper change, and use hand sanitizer if you cannot wash. Ready.gov’s kit list includes diapers, wipes, and diaper rash cream, plus feminine supplies and personal hygiene items.

CLEANING SURFACES WITH BLEACH

If floodwater or sewage has touched surfaces in your home, CDC says to use regular, unscented household bleach (5% to 9% sodium hypochlorite) and gives these mixes:

- **Food-contact surfaces** such as countertops and plates that may have touched floodwater: 1 tablespoon of bleach per 1 gallon of water.
- **Non-food-contact surfaces** such as floors, sinks, and tools that may have touched floodwater: 1 cup of bleach per 5 gallons of water.

■ WARNING

“Never mix bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner” (CDC). If you use bleach indoors, open windows and doors for fresh air. Wear gloves and eye protection, and read and follow the safety instructions on the label.

SANITATION CHECKLIST

SUPPLIES

- ☐ Garbage bags and plastic ties
- ☐ Toilet paper and moist towelettes
- ☐ Soap and hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol
- ☐ Disinfecting wipes
- ☐ Regular, unscented household bleach
- ☐ A large water jug for a handwashing station
- ☐ Diapers, wipes, and diaper rash cream, if needed
- ☐ Feminine supplies and personal hygiene items
- ☐ Water for drinking and sanitation: at least one gallon per person per day

BEFORE YOU NEED IT

- ☐ Find your local emergency toilet and waste disposal guidance
- ☐ Know whether your home is on sewer or septic

DURING THE EVENT

- ☐ Wash hands with soap and safe water at key times
- ☐ Use sanitizer only when soap and water are not available
- ☐ Keep garbage and bagged waste out of living spaces
- ☐ Follow local instructions on flushing and disposal
- ☐ On septic, cut water use if the ground is flooded
- ☐ Never mix bleach with ammonia or other cleaners

If you are sheltering in place after a nuclear emergency, the same supplies belong in your shelter. See fallout shelter supplies and how to shelter in place.

TRACK	Power outage
SHEET	9 of 9
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COMPILED FROM THESE SOURCES

1. Ready.gov, Build a Kit
2. Ready.gov, Food
3. Ready.gov, Water
4. FEMA and American Red Cross, Food and Water in an Emergency (FEMA 477, 2004)
5. CDC, Guidelines for Personal Hygiene During an Emergency
6. CDC, About Handwashing
7. CDC, What to Do to Protect Yourself During a Power Outage
8. CDC, How to Safely Clean and Sanitize with Bleach
9. EPA, Septic Systems: What to Do after the Flood

Every safety claim on this sheet links to its primary source.