



HOME SEWAGE SPILL CLEANUP INSTRUCTIONS

Thorough cleaning of indoor sewage spills is necessary to protect people, especially vulnerable groups like small children, the elderly, and pregnant people, from harmful bacteria and viruses. Cleanup should begin as soon as possible to reduce the risk of exposure to sewage.

DISINFECTION

Choosing a Disinfectant

Chemical disinfectants kill or inhibit the growth of microbes. Many household products are useful disinfectants and should be used in accordance with the directions on the manufacturer's label. *Bleach (sodium hypochlorite) is a common disinfectant and should be used as a 1:10 dilution. Do not use undiluted bleach as this can cause skin and respiratory issues.*

Not all household detergents kill microbes. The term anti-bacterial means that a product kills bacteria but may not be effective against viruses and parasites. Only use products that are labeled as disinfectants as they will be effective against bacteria, viruses, and parasites.

The Environmental Protection Agency's [Design for the Environment \(DfE\)](#) program provides a searchable database of disinfectants that meet the [standard for DfE-certified products](#). Visit epa.gov/pesticide-labels/dfe-certified-disinfectants to locate products containing active ingredients that are alternatives to bleach.

Safely Handle Disinfectants

Chemical detergents and disinfectants can have varying degrees of reactivity depending on their ingredients. Chemicals can affect skin, eyes, mucous membranes, and even the airways and lungs if not handled properly. Here are safe handling practices for mixing and using disinfectants:

- Wear rubber gloves and goggles when working with disinfecting or other cleaning products.
- Read product labels carefully before using a disinfectant.
- Only use disinfectants in well-ventilated areas.
- Be aware of the handling precautions and first aid procedures in case of an accident or emergency.

Do not mix bleach and ammonia cleaners, this creates highly toxic chloramine gas.

INDOOR CLEANUP INSTRUCTIONS

Safety

- Keep children and pets away from the affected area until cleanup has been completed.
- Wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE) including eye protection, rubber gloves, and boots.

Surfaces

- Remove all furniture, rugs, and other moveable objects from the cleanup area.
- Saturated wall-to-wall carpeting and padding usually cannot be adequately cleaned and should be removed, wrapped in plastic, and taken to a solid waste transfer station or sanitary landfill. If you decide to keep the carpeting, hire a licensed carpet cleaning company to steam clean and disinfect the carpet.
- All hard surfaces, such as linoleum, concrete, wood, metal, etc., should be thoroughly cleaned with hot water and a mild dish detergent, then rinsed with a bleach solution by mixing one tablespoon of liquid household unscented bleach to one gallon of water. Allow the surface to air dry.
- Upholstered furniture, rugs, drapery, and other cushioned items should be professionally cleaned. Inform the cleaning company that the items have come into contact with sewage, so they are washed properly.
- Remove and replace plaster, plasterboard, and lath that has been saturated and are soft to the touch. If the surface has been wet, but not saturated, clean as you would a hard surface –avoid saturation and dry thoroughly.
- Clean sinks, dishwashers, and plumbing fixtures that were affected by sewage contact or backup with dish detergent, then rinse with a bleach solution.

Food Items

- Undamaged canned foods that have come into contact with sewage can be cleaned:
 - Remove labels
 - Wash cans with a scrub brush in a dish detergent solution (use washed cans first to avoid rusting)
 - Rinse in clean water
 - Sanitize by:
 - Boiling for 10 minutes (do not boil carbonated beverages or items in plastic containers)
 - Immersing cans in bleach solution for 15 minutes
 - Re-label with marker or grease pencil.
- Discard the following food items that have come in contact with sewage:
 - Open food items

- Food items packaged in plastic, foil, paper, cardboard, or any other non-can packaging
- Home canned goods
- Loose foods such as fruits, potatoes, onions, etc.

When in doubt, throw it out.

Post Cleanup

- Disinfect cleanup mops, brooms, and brushes with a bleach solution.
- Prevent mold growth and reduce odors by increasing air circulation. Open all windows and doors and use fans and heaters if necessary.
- Wash your hands thoroughly and launder clothes separately after completing cleanup.

OUTDOOR CLEANUP INSTRUCTIONS

Safety

- Keep children and pets away from the affected area until cleanup has been completed.
- Wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE) including eye protection, rubber gloves, and boots.

Surfaces

- Do not allow wastewater to enter storm drains.
- Using a shovel, bag all solid waste (toilet paper, feces, etc.) in the spill area and dispose of in a trash container.
- Clean hard surfaces such as paving, concrete, and decking with hot water and a mild dish detergent, then rinse with a bleach solution by mixing one tablespoon of liquid household unscented bleach to one gallon of water. Allow the surface to air dry.
- Contaminated soil, sand, or lawn should be allowed to degrade naturally as microbes will be inactivated within several days of exposure to UV radiation from sunlight. Continue to keep people and pets away from the spill area.
 - Bacterial numbers on grass are generally reduced to background levels within 20 days. Place barriers and signs to restrict access to the spill area during this time.

Larger Spills

- For larger spills, garden lime can be used:
 - Cover the spill area with lime.
 - Use a garden hoe, shovel, or rake to mix the lime into the soil.
 - Place barriers and signs to restrict access during remediation time.
 - If the soil can be thoroughly dried out, it can be reused in an area away from vegetable gardens or where children and pets play.

Post Cleanup

- Disinfect cleanup mops, brooms, and brushes with a bleach solution.
- Wash your hands thoroughly and launder clothes separately after completing clean-up.

For more information, visit smchealth.org/housing.