

CLEANING FLOOD-SOILED CLOTHING

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Floodwater may be contaminated with sewage waste, leaving harmful bacteria in clothing. Hot water and detergent are not enough to reduce the number of bacteria to a safe level.

Research by the U.S. Department of Agriculture shows that certain types of disinfectants will greatly reduce the bacteria that survive the hot water and detergents used in home laundering. A disinfectant must be labeled as such. Products not labeled "disinfectant" will not control bacteria effectively.

A disinfectant such as liquid chlorine bleach in the wash water, will prevent harmful bacteria from being transferred from one article of clothing to another during laundering, or from remaining on the inner surface of the washing machine and being transferred from one load of clothes to the next load.

Follow the directions on the label to determine the amount of bleach needed, but generally 1 cup of bleach is added to a top-loading machine and 1/2 cup to a front-loading machine.

Chlorine bleach is usually harmful to certain fabrics such as wool, silk and durable-press fabrics, and it can cause brightly-colored garments to fade.

Clothes that can be washed at home should be laundered as soon as possible to prevent mildew from damaging the garments.

Laundry Procedure:

1. Shake off all loose soil and rinse each article several times in cool water to remove embedded and surface soil particles. A luke warm water pre-soak with an enzyme product may be helpful.
2. Wash in warm water. Add a little extra detergent to the wash load. Do not immerse flood-soiled clothing in hot, soapy water. If the floodwaters carried red or yellow clay, the hot detergent suds may set rust-colored stains in the fabric.

3. Check for remaining stains before drying. Re-launder if necessary.
4. Dry clothes in an automatic dryer since the heat from the dryer will further reduce the number of surviving bacteria. For clothes that cannot be dried in an automatic dryer, sunshine will help reduce surviving bacteria and odor.
5. Dry-cleanable clothes can be taken to the professional dry cleaner. The chemicals used in dry-cleaning, the flushing action and the steam used in pressing are effective in reducing bacteria to safe levels. Coin-operated dry cleaning units do not use steam in the finishing process, and should not be used to clean flood-soiled clothes.
6. Wool garments (and blankets) that have been damaged by flood water need special treatment. For washable items, shake and brush them to remove soil, then rinse repeatedly in lukewarm water to remove soil particles. Next launder in plenty of suds using a mild soap or detergent recommended for laundering fine fabrics. A disinfectant should be used, but it should not be a liquid chlorine type, since chlorine may cause wool to turn yellow or disintegrate. Rinse thoroughly. Dry wool garments in a warm place but not in direct sunlight.

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