

RECOVERY – Returning Home or Entering a Physical Structure

You and your family's health and safety are priority. Visit additional resources below for mental health resources and financial supports. If you need to find temporary housing or other services, please contact your local government or [Emergency Support Services](#).



Preparing for Return

Your home may be damaged or destroyed. Smoke, soot and ash, chemicals, structural damage, and water damage may make your home unsafe to live. Do not enter the home until you know it is safe.

- Confirm that it is safe to return (e.g. contact building owner/manager, evacuation order update).
- Assemble Safety Equipment and Supplies (e.g. flashlight, camera, first aid kit, tools – hammer/crowbar, drinking water, trash bags, hard hat, puncture-proof/resistant gloves, masks, goggles, hard-soled shoes/boots, cleaning/water extraction supplies – pails, mops, sponges, bleach).

Perimeter Check before Entry

Walk carefully around the outside of the building, checking for signs of damage or danger, take photos for insurance claims. Unless you know it is safe, do not enter building if you detect any of the following:

- Loose power lines. Frayed, broken wires, sparks. Stay away from fallen or damaged wires. Report to BC Hydro or local authority. Be cautious of standing water, as it could carry electrical current.
- Rotten egg smell or hissing sound may indicate a gas leakage. Turn off main valve at gas meter if safe to do so. Report to gas company.
- Damage to foundation, roof or chimney (e.g. cracked basement walls). Other structural failure.
- Damaged propane cylinders for heating or for BBQ appliances.

Entering Building

Use extreme caution. Wear personal protective equipment. Structural damage may have occurred where you least expect it. Take photos for insurance claims. If you notice any signs of damage or danger as noted above, leave the building. Do not re-enter until you know it is safe.

- Check for sewage and water line damage. Sewage may carry pathogens that cause illness. Use personal protective equipment and wash your hands after handling sewage.
- Do not try to turn utilities (eg. Electricity or gas), until you have confirmed with your local utility company.
- Do not use any electrical appliances, especially if they might have been in contact with water/fire retardant.
- Watch for animals. Animals may have sought refuge in the building. Use pole/stick to turn over items.

Surveying Damage of Goods and Systems – Food, Medicine, Water, Sewage, Other

Use extreme caution. Wear personal protective equipment. When in doubt, throw it out. Water, heat, smoke, fumes, chemicals, and the lack of refrigeration may spoil foods and medicine, making them unsafe to consume. Take photos/inventory of items disposed for insurance claims. You may wish to pack and remove any important documents or goods to avoid potential further damage.

- Refrigerated and frozen foods. If foods have been exposed to temperatures of 4°C for more than 2 hours (or for an unknown time), discard. If foods have been exposed to flood waters, discard. If electricity is off, you may consider keeping freezer closed, as frozen food may stay cold for up to three days after loss of power. Discard any foods with unusual colour or smell.
- Dry Goods. Unopened well sealed bags or containers of food may be safe for consumption. Rinsing with potable water may remove any debris or contamination prior to opening. Canned foods showing bulging, severe denting, or other damage may have been exposed to excessive heat, compromising the safety.
- Medicine. Check with a doctor or pharmacist before taking any medicine that may have been damaged or exposed to flood waters. Ask about safe disposal of medicines, as applies.
- Drinking Water. Your drinking water may be unsafe for consumption due to exposure to flood waters, contamination, or lack of power to critical treatment devices. Do not use water until you know it is safe to do so. Shutting the main water supply may prevent contamination of your water lines and protect the water supply until you learn more. For community water systems, contact your water system operator and follow your drinking water emergency response plan. For private water systems (e.g. on your own well or cistern), you will probably need to disinfect your well, and flush the water system/cistern when power is available. Contact [Northern Health Environmental Health \(php@northernhealth.ca\)](mailto:php@northernhealth.ca) or 250-565-7322. Until you know your water is safe, use bottled water or another known safe source of drinking water.
- Sewage System. Do not use the sewerage system until you know it is capable of handling waste. Until then, use designated public facilities, where available. For private sewerage systems, power and water may need to be restored before use. Check septic tank, field, and pipes for any visible damage or shifting. Contact [Northern Health Environmental Health \(php@northernhealth.ca\)](mailto:php@northernhealth.ca) or 250-565-7322, a Registered Onsite Wastewater Practitioner or Professional Engineer should you have any questions.
- Heating, Ventilation Air Conditioning (HVAC) System. Soot and ash may have settled in your air vents and filters. Take note of your air filter size and plan replacement. Cleaning with a vacuum or by a professional may be necessary to improve indoor air quality, especially for individuals with asthma, respiratory sensitivities or chronic conditions.

Next Steps or Before You Leave

After initial survey, you may be able to determine if it is safe to return home or to the building. If it is not safe to return, contact your local government, Emergency Social Services and/or your insurance company for alternative housing solutions, as needed.

- Take any important documents, valuables, and other essentials.
- Secure the premises to avoid looting and further damage, if safe and possible. Board up broken windows and doors. Cover holes in roof/walls. If freezing temperatures are anticipated indoors, drain water lines.
- Plan and prepare clean up of home/building. Contact any contractors, local building authorities, and insurance companies, as required.

If you are feeling unwell and need medical attention, visit your family physician or call 911.

Call Health Link at 811 for health information.

Additional Resources

[Wildfires and your health – Northern Health](#)

Current Wildfire information, Air Quality Advisories, Disaster Stress, Environmental Health



[BC Gov't Disaster Recovery Resources](#)

Mental Health, Re-entering the building, Food, Medicine, Water and Sewage, Cleaning Up, Insurance, Repairs, Replacing Document and Money

