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## Prevent further damage to your flooded home and your health

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(08/15/2016) BATON ROUGE, La. – A flood-damaged home requires special attention to avoid further damage and health hazards from molds, other fungi, algae and bacteria. Wetness and high humidity spur their growth within two to three days, so it's essential to act fast after a flood, according to Claudette Reichel, LSU AgCenter extension housing specialist.

Mold and other fungi are bad for the house and for the occupants. Mold spores are an allergen and some types of molds produce mycotoxins. Decay-causing fungi grow in wood that stays wet for an extended period, causing it to lose strength.

“In a nutshell, a wet house is soon an unhealthy house and eventually a rotting house. To make matters even worse, such secondary damage may be excluded from coverage on your flood and homeowner's insurance,” Reichel said.

If your home has been flooded, it should be cleaned and dried quickly and thoroughly to prevent mold and future damage by wood rot. Because flood water may be contaminated with sewage or other biological pollutants, it's advisable to safely disinfect, too. Areas wetted by clean rainwater—for instance from a leaking roof—may not need to be disinfected. All wet areas should be allowed to dry thoroughly before being covered or enclosed.

“A professional water damage restoration contractor with special drying equipment is the best and safest way to go” Reichel said. “But after a flood many homeowners don't have that option.”

For safety, wear protective clothing on legs, arms, feet and hands while cleaning up debris. Wear rubber gloves and goggles while handling flood-damaged items.

Buildings constructed before 1978 may have lead-based paint. Sanding or scraping this paint creates a serious health hazard. Visit [www.epa.gov/lead](http://www.epa.gov/lead) for more information about lead-based paint before disturbing it. If you hire a contractor to do any work that could disturb paint, be sure the contractor is certified by EPA as a Lead Certified Renovator, Reichel said.

Disinfectants should be chosen and used carefully because they can pose a hazard, too. Commercial disinfecting cleaners need to be diluted as directed to be effective. Bleach solutions, such as 1/4 cup to 1/2 cup liquid chlorine laundry bleach to a gallon of water, are economical general purpose disinfectants but can damage finishes, colors and metals and pose hazards to people. Never use chlorine bleach in or near the air

conditioning system. Never mix bleach with products containing ammonia or acids; that can produce toxic fumes, Reichel said.

Begin by removing wet carpets, carpet pads and rugs within 24 hours. Disinfect the slab. You may be able to clean valuable carpets and rugs but always replace carpet pads, Reichel said.

Remove vinyl, laminate and other impermeable flooring over wood subfloors immediately after the flood has receded. Clean the subfloor. Drying may take weeks in Louisiana's humid climate—less if you can dehumidify the space.

"A buckled subfloor may flatten out on drying, so be patient," Reichel said.

For wood floors, carefully remove a board every few feet to reduce buckling. Leave open until the flooring is dry.

Check inside exterior walls for wet insulation.

"Remove all wet insulation, even if it means cutting into wallboard," Reichel said.

Flush out the insides of the walls. Allow and help wetted areas to dry thoroughly before installing new insulation. If possible, air condition and use a dehumidifier to speed the drying of materials by drying the indoor air.

Fiberglass, cellulose and other porous insulation should be replaced with new material. Saturated insulation will hold water, even if the wall looks dry, and eventually cause wood rot and mold problems. Using insulating foam-board (extruded polystyrene) cut to fit or closed-cell spray foam filling up to 60 percent of the wall cavity can eliminate the need to replace insulation in the next flood.

Check the attic; remove all wet insulation. Let everything dry before replacing the insulation.

Open closet and cabinet doors. Remove drawers for drying and to let air circulate. With slow drying, these may be salvageable, depending on the materials.

Paneled walls have potential to be saved by prying the paneling loose at the bottom. Remove any wet insulation; wash the wall cavity. Hold the bottom of the paneling away from the sill until everything is dry.

Remove vinyl wallpaper to allow sheetrock or paneling to dry. Removing baseboards will help too. Refinish interior walls with latex paint—never use vinyl wallpaper—to allow the walls to continue to dry to the inside. A shellac-based sealer, however, may be needed over ceiling water stains before painting.

Consider replacing all material removed with flood-hardy materials that could withstand future flooding and need only cleaning, instead of replacement. Choose ceramic tile, solid vinyl tile or solid wood flooring (with a vapor permeable finish) and elevate

equipment, when feasible. If your flooded walls have solid wood studs and plywood or board sheathing, consider insulating with closed-cell foam spray insulation or rigid foam boards to fill 60 percent of the wall cavity, and finish with paperless drywall leaving gaps behind molding. After the next flood, you could then remove moldings, flush out the wall cavity and avoid having to gut and replace all the materials.

For more disaster recovery information, visit [www.lsuagcenter.com](http://www.lsuagcenter.com) and select Family and Home, then Hazards and Threats. Or try <http://bit.ly/AgCtrA159>.

A detailed how-to guide, *Rebuild Healthy Homes: Guide to Post-disaster Restoration for a Safe and Healthy Homes* is published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and available online or as a mobile app.

See and learn more about hazard-resistant and high-performance housing at [www.LSUAgCenter.com/LaHouse](http://www.LSUAgCenter.com/LaHouse) and by visiting LaHouse Resource Center in Baton Rouge.

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