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Health Department Emphasizes Precautions Residents Should Take During Hurricane Cleanup

Baton Rouge -- As more residents return to their homes to clean up debris and damage from Hurricane Isaac, health officials remind them to take extra precautions to protect their own health and safety.

“People whose homes were flooded should assume everything the floodwater touched is contaminated and will have to be disinfected before it is safe to use again,” said Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals Secretary Bruce D. Greenstein. “You can do a lot of cleanup and disinfecting with common household cleaning products, and probably won’t need to locate professional services to help you. But, be careful and take the necessary precautions to stay safe and protect your health.”

Health officials offer the following safety precautions for cleaning a home after flood damage:

- Remember to wash your hands frequently with soap and water, and wear rubber gloves to protect your hands while cleaning. Also wear rubber boots during cleanup. This is especially important if sewage backed up into your home during the flooding.
- Clean all walls, hard-surface floors and other household surfaces with soap and water and disinfect them with a solution of 1 ½ cups of chlorine bleach to one gallon of water. Be especially vigilant in disinfecting areas that come in contact with food (e.g. countertops, dining tables), or areas where children play.
- After cleaning a room or item, go over it again with disinfectant to kill germs and odors the floodwaters left.
- Use a two-bucket method when cleaning: put cleaning solution in one bucket and water for rinsing in the other bucket. Replace the rinsing water frequently.

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- Wash all linens and clothing in hot water, or have them dry cleaned.
- Contaminated mattresses and upholstered furniture should be discarded in a proper manner (check with your parish's directives regarding large item pickup.)
- Steam clean carpets. If they remain unclean, discard them along with the padding.
- Remove and discard contaminated household goods such as wall coverings, rugs, cloth and drywall. These are items that can't be disinfected, so they must be thrown out.
- Remove mildew with household mildew cleaner: a mixture of five tablespoons washing soda, or trisodium phosphate, to a gallon of water or 1 ½ cup of laundry chlorine bleach to a gallon of water.
- Empty standing water out of birdbaths, tires, flower pots and other containers on your property to prevent mosquitoes from breeding and swarming, which could increase your risk of West Nile virus.
- If the pilot light on your natural gas furnace, hot-water heater or stove goes out, have it re-lit by a professional (gas company employee or licensed plumber).
- Throw out any food item that has come in contact with the floodwaters, including jarred or canned items that were covered by the water.
- Do not drink water from your taps until it has been declared safe for drinking or has been boiled according to recommendations, if your water system is under boil advisory. Visit www.dhh.la.gov/IsaacBoilAdvisories to see the current list of water systems under boil advisory.

For more health tips on cleaning up your home after flooding, visit DHH's Emergency Preparedness website, www.dhh.louisiana.gov/emergency.

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