Kidsafe Queensland Inc

Home safety after floods

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Child restraints for cars
Contaminated fabric and webbing may be difficult to clean effectively. Chemical disinfectants and bleaches cannot be used as they damage the webbing and compromise the safety of the restraint. Chemicals in the floodwaters may also damage the webbing.
Small metal components may eventually rust and compromise the safety of the restraint.

Therefore Kidsafe recommends that contaminated child restraints – baby capsules, toddler seats and boosters – be discarded and replaced.

Creatures
Be aware that during floods, creatures such as rats, snakes, ants and spiders take refuge in high and hidden places – behind walls and in ceilings. Many Queensland homes have carpet snakes, possums, red-back and other spiders in the ceiling space. Ant nests in ceilings can cause problems with wiring.

Kidsafe recommends the use of mechanical traps, as poisons and pellets are a danger for small children and pets. For the removal of rats, snakes, possums or bees, check your Yellow Pages for appropriately qualified removalists or call a local pest controller to treat ants and spider infestations.

Microbiological safety
Contaminated floodwaters and sludge contain viruses, bacteria, protozoa and fungus hazards. It is essential to wear protective long-sleeves, ankle length pants, gloves and gum boots or other protective footwear while cleaning flood affected items and environments.

Where there has been sewage in the water, hepatitis is a risk. Kidsafe recommends not ingesting contaminated floodwater and sludge. Wash cutlery and crockery with clean water and detergent, then disinfectant and then clean with hot water and detergent before storing in a clean environment.

Bacteria such as e coli, staphylococcus, streptococcus and salmonella can be ingested or enter open wounds. Clean furniture, walls and household items with water and detergent, then disinfectant, then clean with hot water and detergent. For clothing, sheets and towels, wash in water and detergent, then disinfectant, then in a hot/warm machine cycle with washing powder.

Protozoa – Giardia – causes gastric upset through ingestion. Wash your hands with clean water and soap and follow with hand sanitiser.

Fungus and mould is a problem after the flood has receded. It exacerbates asthma and is also a problem for children and people with compromised immune systems. Cleaning with clean water and scrubbing with bleach is the best method but Kidsafe does not recommend using bleach around children and babies. Instead wash walls, furniture and clothing with or in undiluted white vinegar.

Physical safety
Where appliances have been submerged, they should be discarded or tested by an electrician. Where house wiring and meter boards have been submerged, they must be checked by an electrician. Never turn on appliances or light switches to 'see' if it is working.
Asbestos should not be sawn or broken – it should be discarded intact or by a professional.

Remaking a safe house
The household routine can be broken and parents are distracted by cleaning and renovating. Ensure you have a safe play area for your children where they cannot access the driveway or the road particularly when there are workmen and volunteers present. There are also detergents, tools, cleaning fluids, extension leads, plastic bags, buckets and open walls, windows and stairs that are hazardous for infants, toddlers and children. Keep these hazards out of reach of children or keep the children out of the way. Consider making one room safe at a time and install a baby gate to keep your children safe.
Replace smoke alarms.
Replace fly screens.
Remove carpet. Hose rugs and soak in disinfectant or replace.
Remove any residual water – puddles, etc.

Kidsafe recommends that any contaminated equipment, toys or bedding for an infant (under one year of age) be removed, destroyed and replaced. Toys and equipment for older children must be examined closely for suitability to wash with clean water and detergent, disinfectant and washed with detergent again before use. Examine all outdoor equipment and toys for potential rusting of screws and where possible replace screws.

There will be an increase in flies, mosquitoes and biting midges after the floodwaters recede. Protect children with screens, nets, plug in repellents, coils (plug ins and coils are not recommend around babies and toddlers and should be well out of reach of children), and, for older children, insect repellent.

Kidsafe does not recommend applying insect repellent directly onto the skin of an infant (under one year of age).

Kidsafe is working on a backyard recovery fact sheet including pools, vegetable gardens and play areas.

For more information, contact Kidsafe Queensland CEO, Susan Teerds on 0459 128281, (07) 3854 1829 or email susant@kidsafeqld.com.au.

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