

## What to do when your basement floods

**First things first – protect yourself.** You don't know what is in this water that's flooding your basement. It could be nasty water full of things like [E. coli](#), [Salmonella](#), [Hepatitis](#).... Wear gloves, wear waterproof boots. If necessary, wear a mask or goggles. You may feel silly, but wouldn't you rather be silly than sick? Thought so.

**Next, disconnect the main electricity to the basement.** Even if you have only 1 inch of standing water, there could have been a short, or some other electrical issue. Water conducts electricity. Do not be the person to get electrocuted in 1 inch of water. Please.

**Determine the cause of the flood.** If the flood is a result of a broken pipe, turn off the water at the [shut-off valve](#). If it's a backup from a blocked drain, do your best to unblock the drain – rent an auger, remove any visible blockages, anything to get water flowing OUT.

**Open any available windows or doors to let fresh air in.** You may need it if your flood was caused by a block in the septic line.

**Now, get the water out.** If you have only a few inches, you should be able to remove the water yourself. If you have to wear a life jacket just to assess the damage, then call a professional immediately. Depending on how often you have to worry about floods, you may want to invest in a [submersible water pump](#). They come in a variety of sizes and prices, and they work really well to remove water quickly. Otherwise, grab your towels and wet vac and elbow grease cos you're in for some water haulin!

**Run a dehumidifier and fans.** This is the best thing to do once the bulk of the water is removed, and you have determined that there are no electrical issues. A [dehumidifier](#) helps prevent mold formation and removes the moisture out of the air. The dryer the air, the less water-damage restoration you'll have to do later. A good tip to remember – shut the windows when you're running the dehumidifier. You'll be working against the great outdoors, and ultimately yourself, if you forget this step. By this point, most of the water is gone and thus, the wet stagnant stink.

**Carpeting is a problem.** If you have nice carpet with padding, I hate to say it, but chances are you're going to have to rip it up and replace it. Getting the water out of the padding and subflooring is tricky but possible. There are [plenty of resources](#) available to help with this. Additionally, a professional restoration company may be able to salvage your carpeting, but it may be cheaper to just replace it.

If you have just simple berber carpeting with no padding, like I do, then you can dry it out successfully if you move fast during cleanup and employ the use of a lot of fans and dehumidifiers. If possible see if you can lift the carpet to dry underneath. That will help considerably. Your electric bill won't thank you but your lungs will. The thing you're looking to avoid is mold.

**Remove any damaged drywall.** Drywall acts like a sponge when it's wet – soaks it up and hangs onto it for dear life. Plaster walls can be saved, but you need to get some air behind the wall to the dry the studs. [See: mold.](#)

If you do get mold, most resources tell you that you can use a combination of bleach and water to kill it. While this may work if you have concentrated chlorine type bleach, most of the bleach we have on hand is diluted pre-purchase. So by mixing it with water, you're further diluting it and it becomes even less

effective on mold on porous materials. YOU CAN, however, use this bleach/water mix on most hard surfaces like plastic toys, ceramics, glass, stainless steel, etc. The best thing to use on any porous material is a fungicidal spray directly on the affected area.

**The most important thing of all is to disinfect every surface.** Every single thing that touched water needs cleaning. Hot water, heavy-duty cleaner and a scrub brush. This is the worst part, but it's 100% required. I worked in a grid throughout my basement, taking each section in a small square, slowly making my way through the entire area. Then, when I was done surface scrubbing, and the floor was nearly dry, I rented a carpet steam cleaner and scrubbed with that. You definitely don't want to take chances with any sort of bacteria or contamination thinking it's ok to just crash in your basement for a while. It's the roommate who never pays rent, eats all your food and leaves the toilet seat up. In other words – the worst kind there is. **Finally, when in doubt throw it out.** I had to throw away dozens of boxes and clothes. At one point, I just stopped opening boxes and started throwing them out. Even though I was sad to have to get rid of some things I cared about – a ton of books! – I felt physically lighter knowing that all of that STUFF was gone. I could have saved some things, sure. There are ways to [dry out](#) books, paper, clothes, things. But you have to consider if it's worth the time and the work you need to invest to avoid getting sick. Some sources tell you to throw away any pillows, stuffed animals or other plush-type materials immediately. Others tell you they can be cleaned. I think the takeaway here is that it depends on the level of water damage and for how long it's been exposed to the water. In my case, we had about 4 inches and the water had only been there for a couple of hours at most. The blankets and pillows were wet, but not soaked, and weren't completely gross. We took them to the industrial washer/dryers at the laundromat and they managed to clean up just fine. Use your best judgment. If it looks unsalvageable, it probably is.

But remember, the most important thing when cleaning up a basement flood is getting rid of the water. While that may seem the most obvious, sometimes, people go through boxes, sort through things that can be saved, or wait to decide if they can do the cleanup themselves or hire a contractor. Don't waste time. Get working on that water because the longer you wait, the more damage you accrue, and the harder it will be in the long run.