

Protecting Your Health in an Emergency

Southland Civil Defence Emergency Management Group



Disruption to power supplies, water and sewerage reticulation for any length of time can result in unhealthy environments and an increased risk of communicable diseases such as gastroenteritis and respiratory illness. Young children, the elderly and those with chronic illness are most at risk.

Respiratory viruses are passed on by droplets when people cough and sneeze. These viruses can survive for 48hrs on surfaces and may be picked up on hands and transferred to the face and mouth. Gastro enteric diseases can be spread via the faecal oral route in contaminated food or water and via aerosol spread following projectile vomiting. These organisms can also survive on surfaces for extended periods and may be picked up on hands and transferred to the mouth.

KEY MESSAGES

Hand hygiene is the most important way of preventing the spread of disease Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and if possible, warm water and dry thoroughly before -

- preparing food and eating, after coughing and sneezing, blowing your nose, wiping children's noses, going to the toilet, looking after sick people and after undertaking environmental cleaning

Social Distancing

- Stay home if you are sick
- Don't share utensils, cutlery, water bottles with sick people
- Where possible keep at arms length from sick people

Environmental Cleaning

- Always clean before you disinfect
- Disinfection solutions need to be made up fresh each day

Food and Water

- Food in a fridge or freezer will spoil with power failure. Have reserves of drinking water and non-perishable foods.

Disposal of Waste

- Place general rubbish in heavy duty plastic bags to protect from flies and vermin
- Store sewage waste in strong leak proof plastic bags buried underground.

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1. General Hygiene

- A. **Hand Hygiene** is the most important way of preventing the spread of disease
- Wash and dry hands before preparing food and eating, after coughing and sneezing, blowing your nose, wiping children's noses, going to the toilet and looking after sick people and after undertaking environmental cleaning.
 - Wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and where possible warm water then dry them thoroughly for at least 20 seconds.
 - Alcohol gels (60% or more alcohol) can be used on visibly clean hands.
- B. **Cough Etiquette**
- Cough/sneeze into the crook of your elbow not into your hand
 - Use tissues or toilet paper for coughs/sneezes and dispose of immediately either down the toilet or into a rubbish bin
- C. **Social Distancing**
- Stay home if you are sick
 - Don't share utensils, drink bottles with sick people
 - If possible, stay at arms length (one meter) from others in particular sick people to reduce the chance of catching illnesses

2. Environmental Cleaning

- A. **Identify High Risk Areas**
- These include food preparation areas, high use equipment such as door and tap handles, toilets, nappy changing areas, toys and play equipment, areas visibly contaminated with vomit / faeces.
- B. **Have a Regular Cleaning Regime**
- High risk areas need more frequent cleaning and should be cleaned last to avoid contamination

FACTSHEET

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C. How to Clean

- First clean with hot water and detergent to remove dirt.
- Then wearing gloves, use a disinfectant such as bleach (eg Janola, White Magic, Domestos) to kill the micro-organisms that cause respiratory and gastro enteric illness
- Supermarket bleaches are sold in different strengths, usually 2–5% sodium hypochlorite solution. Make up fresh disinfection solution each day as per the instructions on the label and discard any leftovers after 24 hours
- Wipe the disinfection solution onto previously cleaned hard surfaces and leave to air dry for at least 10 minutes.
- If items are being placed into a disinfection solution they should be soaked for 30 minutes and allowed to air dry
- Alcohol wipes (60% or more alcohol) are recommended for surfaces e.g. keyboards and telephones, that cannot be wiped with disinfection solutions.
- Disposable cloths, used only the once, are recommended for cleaning high risk areas. If reusable cloths are used, different coloured cloths should be used for and restricted to specific areas. Reusable cloths should be soaked in disinfection solution before drying.
- Reusable mops should be soaked overnight in bleach solution
- In the case of respiratory illnesses carpets or soft furnishings can be cleaned with domestic household carpet cleaning and fabric cleaning products

3. Disposal of Waste

A. General Waste

- Dispose of used paper towels, tissues, disposable cleaning cloths, gloves, aprons etc by placing into a heavy duty plastic bag sealed or tied and then into the general rubbish bin.
- Use plastic bin liners to avoid leakage
- Change bin liners daily rather than empty contents to avoid double handling
- If you do not have refuse collection bury the bag in your backyard for collection when services resume or burn it

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B. Disposing of Sewage

- Human waste can spread disease. Use a sturdy bucket or rubbish bin lined with a strong, leak proof plastic liner as a makeshift toilet. Put half a cup of liquid bleach or some kitty litter into the plastic liner.
- Keep the bin completely covered when not in use and when full tie the top firmly, place it within another bag.
- Store the bag/s by burying underground away from your vegetable garden and downstream from any water source
- When normal systems/services are operational uplift bags and dispose of contents through a toilet system.

4. Water

To make water safe for drinking, food preparation and hygiene:

- boil for 1 minute or
- add five drops of household bleach (e.g. Janola) per litre and stand for 30 minutes
- Bottled water and cans of drink will leave more water for cooking and hygiene

5. Food

Food will spoil if electricity fails for any length of time. Use food supplies in the following order

- Fresh foods and food from the fridge (open as few times as possible)
- Food from a cabinet freezer
- Food from a chest freezer
- Canned and packaged foods should be used last

Use treated water (boil for 1 minute) when preparing food

For more details on “Protecting your health in an emergency” refer to

<http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/pagesmh/977>