

# Health and Hygiene in Evacuation Centers

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Evacuation centers provide temporary shelter for persons displaced from their homes following a disaster. These facilities vary by location and by the extent of damage to the area. Office buildings, sports stadiums, churches, residential homes, dormitories and community centers may all serve as emergency shelters. Evacuees are required to share living spaces, bathrooms, and kitchen facilities with others. They may also be exposed to overly crowded conditions, making them vulnerable to outbreaks of infectious diseases.

As an evacuee, you can help prevent the spread of infection by taking the following three steps:

## Step One: Wash your hands

Wash your hands often with soap and warm water. Scrub hands for at least 20 seconds—be sure to wash your wrists, backs of hands, between your fingers, and under fingernails and jewelry.

Wash your hands:

- Before preparing or eating food
- After using the bathroom
- After changing a diaper or helping a child in the bathroom
- Before and after tending to someone who is sick
- After handling uncooked foods, particularly raw meat, poultry, or fish
- After blowing your nose, sneezing, or coughing
- After handling garbage
- After handling an animal or animal waste
- Whenever hands are visibly dirty

When soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that is at least 60 percent alcohol. Hand sanitizers do not remove surface dirt or other debris, so wash your hands as soon as running water and soap are available.

When using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:

- Apply the product to the palm of one hand.
- Rub your hands together, making sure the product reaches all surfaces of your hands and fingers. Rub your hands until they are dry.

## **Step Two: Practice good personal hygiene**

- Don't share personal items, such as hair brushes, combs, razors, toothbrushes or towels with anyone.
- Don't share drinks or eating utensils.
- Use disposable tissues to blow your nose.
- Use your upper sleeve to cover your cough.

## **Step Three: Maintain a clean living space**

- Clean and disinfect high risk surfaces. Examples are food preparation areas, diaper changing tables, shared bathrooms, etc. First, clean surfaces detergent and water to remove dirt and other debris. Then, disinfect with an

EPA-registered disinfectant to kill germs. A mixture of  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of bleach per gallon of water is an excellent disinfectant. This solution loses strength to evaporation so make a fresh batch of bleach solution daily. Never mix bleach and ammonia because it creates noxious fumes.

- Clean and wash mattresses, bed frames and pillows between departures and arrivals of other evacuees.
- Clean spills immediately.
- Clean kitchens and bathrooms with a disinfectant several times a day—everyday.
- Clean all surfaces in the living area with a household detergent at least once a week.
- Stock kitchens and bathrooms with toilet tissue, paper towels and soap at all times.
- Line trash cans with plastic bags that can be tied shut. Store all trash away from living areas and put it outside before it overflows.
- Separate medical waste (syringes and needles) from household waste for pick-up. If a biohazard receptacle is not available, you can use a laundry detergent bottle as long as it is properly labeled.

Material adapted from the  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,  
Emergency Preparedness and Response series. [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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