



Southwest Center

Pediatric Environmental Health

Sludge, Debris, and Mud after Flooding: Special Considerations for Children

Q: Do I need to be worried about my child playing in areas that were once flooded but are now dry or in areas that may contain debris?

A: Playing actively outside is great for children. Children need space to run and play that is free from debris and chemical spills. Debris, mud, and sludge may affect children in three ways.

- Excessive debris puts children at increased risk for physical injuries. They may trip over limbs or fall on sharp objects as they play.
- Mud and sludge from the recent floodwaters may contain hazardous chemicals, like lead, asbestos, oil and gasoline. Adults eat about a teaspoon of dirt per day through normal, every day activities, and children eat even more because they play in dirt.
- As the debris and mud dry out, fine particles will be released into the air. Since children breathe faster and exercise more than adults, their breathing could be affected by the increased particles.

Q: When I return home with my children, what should I do about debris, mud, and sludge around my home?

A: Children need to exercise outside to stay healthy. You can minimize the risk from receding flood waters by doing the following:

- Clear debris from the area around your home before children return. Observe streets, schools, and parks in your neighborhood. Do not bring children to the neighborhood until these appear to be cleaned up.
- Wash children's hands with soap and water after playing outside. This will prevent much of the material from reaching their mouths.
- Watch for air quality reports pertaining to your neighborhood. The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality and the Environmental Protection Agency will publish reports in the local news, radio, newspapers, and on the internet. As of September 23, 2005, air pollution in most areas is about the same as historical levels for this time of year.

Q: What if my child gets sick after returning to a flooded area?

A: Most illnesses in children will be due to common viruses unrelated to sludge, toxins, or debris from the flood. Your child should see a health care provider for the same reasons as before the flood, such as persistent high fever, vomiting and diarrhea to the point of dehydration, or difficulty breathing.