

## **State Health Department: Safety Is Vital During Hurricane Sandy Post-Storm Cleanup Offers tips to protect health and safety**

**ALBANY, N.Y. (October 30, 2012)** – State Health Commissioner Nirav R. Shah, M.D., M.P.H., urged all New Yorkers to protect their health and safety during the recovery from Hurricane Sandy.

“This storm had a devastating effect on many communities and will require extensive recovery efforts,” Commissioner Shah said. “During the cleanup, people should be aware of potential hazards and take precautions to ensure that they are safe at all times.”

The State Health Department has posted a page containing up-to-date information about Hurricane Sandy preparedness and recovery, including safety recommendations. People can access this page at: <http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/emergency/weather/hurricane/>.

Recommended safety tips include:

### **When returning to your home:**

- Return home only when authorities say it is safe to do so.
- Beware of structural damage. Roofs and floors may be weakened and in need of repair. Check the building foundation, chimney, and surrounding land for damage.
- Turn off any outside gas lines at the meter or tank. Open windows to let the building air out to remove foul odors or escaping gas.
- Upon entering the building, use a battery-powered flashlight. Do not use an open flame as a source of light since gas may still be trapped inside.
- When inspecting the building, wear heavy-soled rubber boots and gloves. Watch for electrical shorts and live wires before making certain the main power switch is off.
- Have electric, gas, and water connections checked before turning them back on.
- Clean up spilled medicines, bleaches, or gasoline or other flammable liquids immediately. Leave the area immediately if you smell gas or chemical fumes.
- Take extra precautions to prevent fire. Lowered pressure in water mains may make firefighting extremely difficult.

### **Avoid Carbon Monoxide:**

- If power is out, do not use generators, gas grills or charcoal inside the home to stay warm – Carbon Monoxide (CO) is an invisible, odorless, and tasteless gas that can be deadly. Make sure your CO detectors are working and report any problems to local authorities. If during cleanup you feel sick, dizzy or weak, go out into the fresh air.

### **Food safety:**

- Check for spoilage before using food from refrigerator or ice chest: “When in doubt, throw it out!”

- Do not assume refrigerated foods are safe. If food is still fully frozen, however, it is okay to use.
- Discard any canned foods that are rusted or dented, or if the can is open. Also do not eat food that was stored in cardboard boxes, screw top jars or bottles.
- Formula-fed infants should be fed only pre-mixed, canned baby formula.
- Throw out foods or medicines that have been in contact with floodwaters.

**Water safety:**

- Be alert to and follow any boil water advisories that are issued.
- Use an emergency water supply or boil your water before using until there is official word that the water is safe.
- If the public water system is declared unsafe by health officials, water for drinking and cooking should be boiled vigorously for no less than 10 minutes.

**Prevent illness by practicing good sanitation and hygiene:**

- Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected before eating and after toilet use, cleanup activities or handling items contaminated by floodwater or sewage.
- Do not allow children to play in floodwater or with toys that are contaminated by floodwater.

**Prevent mold growth:**

- Moisture that enters buildings from leaks or flooding accelerates mold growth. Promptly remove standing water and wet materials from your home or office and ventilate these areas using fans and dehumidifiers if possible.
- If mold growth has already occurred, it is best to have a professional remove it.
- Individuals with known mold allergies or asthma should never clean or remove mold.
- If you do clean up mold, use a 10 percent bleach solution.

**Immunizations:**

- It is recommended that anyone involved in cleanup or repair efforts after the storm have an up-to-date tetanus vaccination (within the last 10 years) or receive a tetanus booster to prevent bacterial infection.

**Garbage storage, collection and disposal:**

- Storm clean-up activities may produce a great deal of garbage. Local authorities will tell you where and when collection will occur. Garbage invites insects and rodents. Rodents, in particular, may be looking for food because the flood may have destroyed their homes and normal food source.
- Store any garbage in watertight, rodent/insect-proof containers with tight-fitting covers. Use plastic liners if available.

For the latest information on the storm, visit the following links:

- Further information about Hurricane Sandy, go to <http://www.governor.ny.gov/>
- Additional storm preparedness information, go to <http://www.dhSES.ny.gov/aware-prepare/>.
- FAQs: <http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/emergency/weather/hurricane/faq/>

- Helpline for New York State Residents: 1-888-769-7243
- For Disaster Assistance contact FEMA at 1-800-621-3362
- Search for open shelters by texting: SHELTER and a Zip Code to 43362 (4FEMA). Ex: Shelter 01234 (std rates apply).

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