

Health and Hygiene in Evacuation Centers

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 essential steps.

Step One: Washing your hands

Use hot soap and water to wash your hands. This is particularly critical for food handlers. Scrub for at least 15 seconds and don't forget to clean your fingernails and wrists. Only if soap and water are not available, alcohol-based hand sanitizers can be used as an alternative.

When should you wash your hands?

- ◆ Before eating
- ◆ After using the bathroom
- ◆ After changing a diaper or assisting a child in the bathroom
- ◆ After handling uncooked foods (meat, poultry or fish)
- ◆ After caring for a sick person
- ◆ After blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing
- ◆ After touching garbage
- ◆ After having contact with an animal or animal waste

Step Two: Practicing 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 tissues to cover coughs and to blow your nose.

Step Three: Maintaining a clean living space

- ◆ Sanitize high risk surfaces. Examples are food preparation areas, diaper changing tables and surfaces soiled with body fluid (flood, feces and vomit). To sanitize, use 1 teaspoon of household bleach in 1 quart of clean water. Any cleaning product with a label stating that it is a sanitizer will also work.

- ◆ Clean all surfaces in the living area with a household detergent at least once a week.
- ◆ Clean and wash mattresses, bed frames and pillows in between departures and arrivals of other evacuees.
- ◆ Clean spills immediately.
- ◆ Clean kitchens and bathrooms with a sanitizer several times a day – everyday!
- ◆ Stock kitchens and bathrooms with 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.

Written by Lisa Norman, September 29, 2005

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