



Post-Hurricane Ike
Public Health Advisory
For Galveston Residents Hoping to Return to the Island this Week

*Dr. Mark Guidry, Local Health Authority
Monday, September 22, 2008*

Beginning Tuesday September 23rd at 10:00 a.m., the Galveston County Health District will begin operating a phone bank where residents can call for answers to common health and safety questions. For questions that phone bank staffs are unable to answer, callers will be directed to an appropriate Galveston County Health District employee for assistance. Once opened, the phone bank can be reached at (409) 938-7221.

I understand the incredible need to return home after the hurricane to begin rebuilding your lives and your sense of community. Be aware that Galveston, to date, has minimal to no public health infrastructure. As such public health and medical officials are most concerned about injuries, illnesses, disease outbreaks, toxic exposures, stress-related consequences, and even deaths.

Returning home means, there are no hospital services on the island, there are minimal emergency services, there are limited primary care services, and limited local public health support systems. Furthermore, there is severely limited electrical power and inadequate to no safe drinking water and sewage systems, creating additional health and safety risks beyond the obvious destruction and flooding caused by Hurricane IKE.

As such, the following residents are hereby advised not to return to the island this week and until the public health & medical care infrastructure has the capacity to meet your special needs:

- If you have special needs or chronic health problems (heart problems, uncontrolled diabetes or diabetes requiring insulin, chronic respiratory problems, kidney disease, immune suppression, etc).
- If you have any medical condition that requires frequent following and medical management or requires hospitalization.
- If you are disabled, you use durable medical equipment, you depend on an oxygen delivery system, you are physically incapacitated in any way.
- If you have children, do not bring them with you. This is not a safe or healthy place for children. Do not bring children this week.
- If you have known allergic reactions to mold, do not return this week. You may need assistance from family, friends, or neighbors, and contractors.
- If you are not prepared with supplies for your own health and safety.

If you meet any of the above conditions and decide to return to the island this week, be fully informed about what you will encounter, about the risks to your own health and safety, about the limitations of the current public health and medical infrastructure, and about what you can do to minimize your risk of injury and illness.

GET PREPARED BEFORE YOU ARRIVE BY:

- Get mentally prepared. Returning home after a hurricane can be an extremely emotional experience that could impact your health.

- Bring food and water to last you for the duration of your stay
- Have plenty of hand sanitizer
- Have thick long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Have protective gloves to handle sharp and contaminated objects, etc
- Have protective footwear such as work boots
- Wear a hat to protect you from the sun
- Make safe arrangements for your children
- Have bleach and other cleaning supplies for refrigerators and freezers, etc
- Have a working flashlight with a backup battery supply
- Have face mask for potential exposure to odors, toxins, and mold
- Have mosquito spray
- Get a tetanus shot if you have not had a tetanus shot in over ten years - *Tetanus shot are routinely recommended for adults every ten years. Call the Galveston County Health District at (409) 938-7221 for information and locations*
- Have clean water and a first aid kit with bandages, antibiotic ointment, etc. in case of a puncture wound or laceration
- Fully charge your cell phone before returning to the island. Even such, at time services have been intermittent and calls are lost.
- Consider buying rodent control - *The Galveston County Health District will have rat bait available to residents. For information, call (409) 938-7221*
- Consider any tools you may need and a shovel (snakes)
- Arrive with a full tank of gasoline in your vehicle
- Check weather reports before returning to the island

BE ADVISED AND FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS AS FOLLOWS:

Water:

- Follow public drinking water safety notices issued by local officials.

- If water is available to you, follow “boil water” alerts that may be issued by local officials. Do not drink water from unknown sources.
- Only use bottled, boiled or treated water until water has been tested and found safe.
- When boiling water for drinking purposes, allow it to boil for at least one minute - *Water also may be disinfected with chlorine or iodine (follow package directions) or with ordinary household bleach — one-eighth teaspoon (about eight drops) per gallon of water. Sterilize water containers and drinking utensils with a solution of household bleach.*

Food:

- Discard food in refrigerators and freezers. Do not eat.
- Wash hands with soap and disinfected water before eating or handling food, after clean-up work and after handling flood water-contaminated items.

Environmental Hazards:

- Fires/explosions - Do not use lanterns or torches until your premise(s) is determined to be safe from gas leaks.
- Do not attempt to light gas water heaters
- Electrical - if your home has flood water in it, do not enter until the main electrical power is turned off.
- Debris Injuries - Wear protective footwear and heavy gloves to reduce the chances of punctures or cuts from nails and many other sharp or contaminated objects - *If you get a puncture or laceration, clean with soap and clean water and apply an antibiotic ointment. Serious skin infections have been reported to the Health District. Seek medical care if a wound is serious. You will also need a tetanus shot if your last one was more than 5 years ago. Call Galveston County Health District (409) 938-7221 for location of nearest medical clinic*
- Carbon monoxide poisoning - Do not place generators indoors including garages. Read and closely follow the manufacturer’s safety instructions for operation.

- Animal bites - Do not handle any stray animal or wildlife; notify local authorities. Seek immediate treatment if bitten or injured by an animal and notify authorities. Snakes and other wildlife may seek shelter in trees, homes and vehicles.
- Rodent Control – apply approved rodent control according to instructions.
- Snakes – poisonous snakes have been found, especially under debris when lifted - *If you sustain a snake bite, call 911 immediately*
- Odors – toxic odors and dead animals – report to local authorities
- Mold – wear a face mask and avoid prolonged exposure. Open windows and doors for ventilation and drying. Seek instruction from local authorities and certified contractors on how to safely address.
- Fallen trees – do not attempt to handle alone. Use caution in handling a chain saw and follow manufacturer instructions.
- Auto Accidents – drive slowly and carefully on the island. Traffic lights may not be operational. Stay alert at all times while driving.

Mosquito Bites

Mosquito activity is expected to increase in the aftermath of Hurricane Ike. The mix of storm debris and standing water left behind provide many breeding grounds for mosquitoes. To prevent mosquito bites and the risk of West Nile infections:

- use an insect repellent containing DEET
- Where possible, wear long-sleeved clothing and long-pants.
- Where possible, empty any containers that can hold water such as flowerpots, tires, buckets and other containers.

Final Note: Even with all the precautions above, accidents and injuries may occur.

- Stay alert.
- Stay hydrated with clean water, and rest between strenuous tasks.
- Get help for tasks that are too difficult.

- Keep emergency contact numbers handy and your cell phone fully charged

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Media seeking additional information contact:

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