

Infection Prevention Guidance for Outpatient Healthcare Facilities Experiencing an Interruption in Water Service

This document provides infection prevention guidance for outpatient healthcare facilities that are providing patient care with limited resources due to disruptions from Hurricane Helene. Decisions about whether and when to reopen for patient care are beyond the scope of this guidance and should be made by the facilities in consultation with any relevant regulatory agencies. Please submit infection prevention inquiries to infectionprevention@dhhs.nc.gov. Information from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regarding hand hygiene in hurricane-affected areas is available [here](#).

Refer to county and municipal authorities for questions regarding:

- Current local sewage disposal guidance
- Clean water access and conservation

Water Use

Confirm the water is safe before using for drinking, patient hygiene (i.e., bathing, oral hygiene, or dental care) or for environmental cleaning/use. Facilities on municipal water should follow guidance from their water provider. Facilities that use private wells should follow [guidance](#) to ensure water safety.

If water is non-potable or a boil water advisory is in effect, alert patients, family, and staff not to use water unless boiled or [disinfected](#), or use bottled water.

- If the safety of water is uncertain, single-use supplies, such as bath wipes and mouth care kits, should be utilized. Use bottled or boiled water during care for infants, young children and anyone with a weakened immune system, wounds, or abrasions.
- [Water for sterile processing](#) should meet the AAMI recommended standards.
- See resource links below for facilities providing dialysis services.
- Follow [guidance on steps to take](#) after an extended boil advisory is lifted and normal operations resume.
- **Toilet use:** If access to potable water systems is not restored when a facility opens, ideally use portable toilets. Acquire or set up [hand washing stations](#) or ensure hand sanitizer is available for use after toileting.
 - See flowcharts below for guidance on toilets and waste disposal if portable toilets are not obtainable.
 - Advise patients ahead of time on the status of toilets and the importance of limiting non-essential use.

Hand hygiene

- In most healthcare situations, hand sanitizer is the preferred method for hand hygiene.
- If hands are visibly soiled, they should be washed with clean water and soap.
- Under typical circumstances, washing with soap and water is also recommended before eating and after using the bathroom. If handwashing is not available in these situations, use disposable wipes to clean hands prior to using hand sanitizer.
- Use potable bottled water for hand hygiene. If not available, use treated water such as filtered water, boiled water that has cooled, or [disinfected](#) water.

- Outpatient surgery clinics should follow facility policies for hand hygiene/surgical scrub.

Waste Disposal

If you are not able to dispose of biohazard waste via normal operations, waste should be handled utilizing standard precautions and stored in a leak-proof container (with a lid), labeled biohazard and disposed of in accordance with current local waste disposal guidance. Protect from human and animal access until proper disposal.

Environmental Concerns after Water Intrusion/Disruption

Assess facility for water intrusion. Monitor facility for mold growth and related odors.

Stagnant or standing water in a plumbing system can increase the [risk for growth and spread](#) of Legionella and other biofilm-associated bacteria. Perform extensive [inspection of the facility's](#) water, ventilation and electrical systems and coordinate remediation as needed.

Supplies

Inspect all medical supplies and equipment for damage or contamination. Compromised single-use supplies must be discarded. Single-use items should not be reprocessed. If no alternative is available, the device should be [validated for reprocessing](#). [Compromised equipment](#), such as dialysis or sterilization equipment, should be evaluated per manufacturer's instructions prior to use.

Facility structural material, furniture and other items should be [assessed for continued use](#). Porous material (including structural material) generally should be removed and replaced if it has been wet for over 48 hours. Non-porous materials that can be fully dried can be cleaned for reuse, and if necessary, disinfected with bleach.

Resources

[CDC: Healthcare Water System Repair and Recovery Following a Boil Water Alert or Disruption of Water Supply](#)

[CDC: Emergency Water Supply Planning Guide for Hospitals and Healthcare Facilities](#)

[CDC: Remediation and Infection Control Considerations for Reopening Healthcare Facilities Closed Due to Extensive Water and Wind Damage](#)

[EPA: Mold: Worker and Employer Guide to Hazards and Recommended Controls](#)

[CDC: Reopening Buildings Guidance](#)

Dialysis Resources

[CDC: Water Use in Dialysis, Boil water advisory procedures](#)

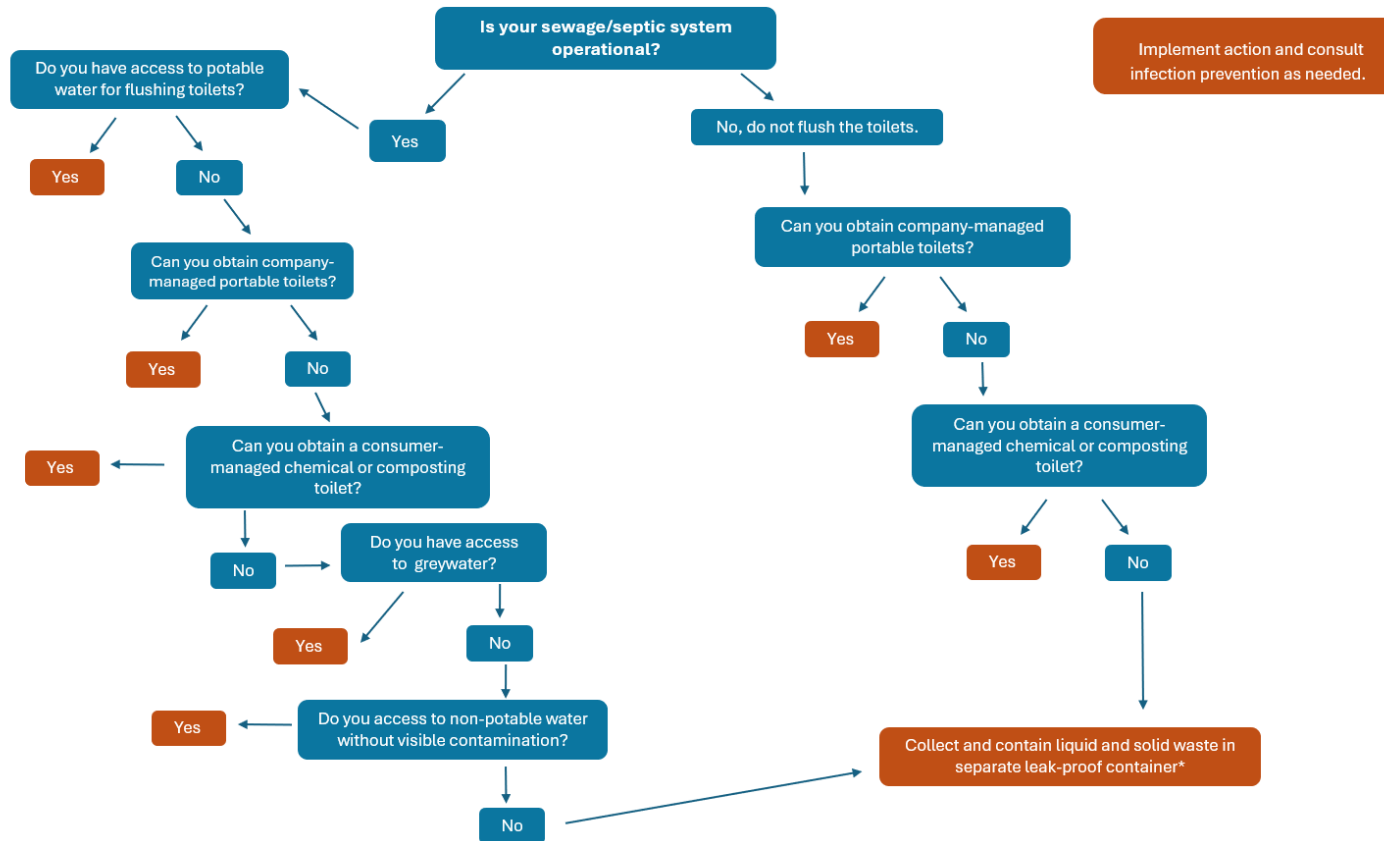
[CDC: Safe Use of "Tanker" Water for Dialysis](#)

[CDC: Technical Considerations When Bringing Hemodialysis Facilities' Water Systems Back on Line After a Disaster](#)

Bathroom Facilities in Outpatient Healthcare Facilities Without Water During Hurricane Recovery



Set up [hand washing stations](#) or ensure hand sanitizer is available for use after toileting. For questions please contact infectionprevention@dhhs.nc.gov



Definitions

Company-managed portable toilets: Chemical toilet that is managed and serviced by a company

Consumer-managed chemical or composting toilets: Purchased toilets that are managed and emptied by the consumer

Empty waste per manufacturer's instructions for use and dispose of waste according to local waste management in your area

Potable water: Water that has been deemed safe for human consumption

Greywater: Previously potable water that has been used for non-toileting purposes (hand washing, bathing, laundry, dishwashing, etc.)

Non-potable water without visible contamination: Water that is in appearance the cleanest available. Do not use water that is visibly dirty, malodorous or is obviously contaminated

*Containers must be leak-proof, have a lid and labeled biohazard. Develop a containment plan for protecting waste from human or animal access until it can be disposed properly. Follow county and municipal guidance for waste disposal in your area.

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