

Best Practices for Reopening Community Parks and Playgrounds Following Hurricane Helene



Parks and playgrounds play a crucial role in communities. They are a place to enhance well-being and promote cohesion. NCDHHS understands the importance of reopening these spaces for community to gather, be outside and children to play. Following Hurricane Helene, many outdoor public spaces, including community parks and playgrounds, may have experienced flooding. To keep everyone safe, it is important to assess these areas for any hazards and ensure proper cleaning before reopening to the public. Here are some considerations when reopening:

Hazard Assessment:

- Hazards and exposures may vary depending on location and proximity to other structures or businesses such as septic systems, wastewater treatment plants or industrial sites. Conduct a thorough assessment of each area to identify potential hazards.

Safety Precautions:

- Wear appropriate safety gear during cleanup: rubber boots, long pants and long sleeves, heavy rubber gloves, goggles and an N-95 mask, as available.
- Remove any obvious hazards, including large debris and broken glass, and clear away or spread silt, sand and soil left by the flood.

Drying and Sunlight Exposure:

- Allow the soil to dry out. UV sunlight can help kill some bacteria and viruses. Spread out any remaining silt, sand and soil to facilitate drying.

Playground Equipment Inspection:

- Inspect all playground equipment for damage. Clean with soap and water to remove dirt from floodwaters.
- Floodwater and mud may contain harmful substances. Disinfect equipment using a solution of 1/3 cup of household bleach mixed with 1 gallon of water.

Loose Fill Surface Maintenance:

- Remove and replace loose fill surfaces (e.g., sand, gravel, wood chips, mulch) whenever possible. If replacement is not feasible, remove debris and silt, spreading the fill material out to dry in the sun.

Solid Surface Cleaning:

- Pressure wash solid surfaces like rubber tiles and walking paths.

Hand Hygiene Promotion:

- Ensure that handwashing facilities are available and promote proper handwashing practices. Place signage in restrooms and around playgrounds to encourage visitors to wash their hands thoroughly after use, as able.

Grass and Sports Field Maintenance:

- To control microbial hazards, consider using hydrated lime according to manufacturer instructions while wearing protective clothing.
- Spread new, uncontaminated soil on previously flooded fields and consider planting new grass.

Standing Water Management:

- Inspect for areas of standing water that could create mosquito or pest hazards. Take appropriate measures to mitigate these risks.

