

Flooded basement: the first hours

A checklist to keep by the basement stairs.

Below the Sill

SAFETY FIRST

- ☐ **Don't go in if the electricity could be live in the water.** If you can't shut off the power from a dry spot, call an electrician, the fire department or your utility.
- ☐ **If you smell gas, get out.** Don't touch switches or use flames. Call the gas company from outside.

THEN, IN THIS ORDER

- ☐ **Find out what kind of water it is.** A broken supply pipe isn't the same as sewage or floodwater from outside.
- ☐ **Stop the source** if you can do it safely: the main water valve, an appliance supply line.
- ☐ **Take photos** before anything is torn out, for your insurance.
- ☐ **Call your insurance company** and document everything.
- ☐ **Get the water out and start drying** as soon as possible. The EPA's target is to dry wet materials within 24 to 48 hours, when possible.
- ☐ **Ground outside still saturated? Don't pump it all out at once.** If a wall is bowed, cracked or displaced, or there's still floodwater outside, get an evaluation before pumping hard.

DON'T

- × Walk into water where there could be electricity
- × Run a generator indoors
- × Mix cleaning chemicals
- × Use a household vacuum on standing water
- × Point fans at visible mold
- × Tear out contaminated materials without protective gear

CALL A PROFESSIONAL IF THERE'S

- ☐ Sewage or floodwater from outside
- ☐ Any electrical risk
- ☐ A lot of standing water
- ☐ A finished basement, or wet walls and insulation
- ☐ Water that has been sitting for a long time
- ☐ Contamination in the HVAC system
- ☐ Visible mold
- ☐ Or if you simply can't get it dry

ONCE IT'S DRY

- ☐ **Find out why it flooded.** Rain and drainage, a failed sump pump or a power outage, plumbing, a sewer backup, window wells. The right fix depends on the cause.

By Robert Stulpt · belowthesill.com/basement-water/flooding/ · Sources: EPA, A brief guide to mold, moisture and your home (2026); CDC, Reentering your flooded home. This checklist doesn't replace your insurer's or local emergency officials' instructions.