

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | Date: 03/20/19

CONTACT: James Martinez | American Lung Association
P: 312-445-2501 E: James.Martinez@Lung.org

Proper Post-Flood Cleanup Essential to Protect Lung Health of Residents Impacted by Historic Flooding in Midwest

CHICAGO (March 20, 2019) – As historic flooding hits the Midwest, residents in Nebraska, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota and South Dakota face damage to homes and communities. This loss is tragic, and the cleanup of flooding itself creates the potential for serious and long-lasting threats to health. The American Lung Association shares tips for a safe return after the waters recede.

The Lung Association stresses the importance of beginning the cleanup effort as soon as flood waters recede and following proven tips to reduce health risks. Chemicals, sewage, oil, gas and other dangerous substances found in floodwaters can pose health risks to area residents.

“Standing water and dampness is a breeding ground for bacteria, viruses and mold,” warns American Lung Association Chief Medical Officer Albert Rizzo, M.D. “These can become airborne and inhaled, putting people at risk for lung disease. In fact, mold has been associated with wheezing, coughing, and in some cases asthma attacks, and some evidence links mold with respiratory illness in otherwise healthy children.”

Mold can grow anywhere there is water or dampness. Cleaning up affected homes and household items after the water recedes is vital to protecting respiratory health. The American Lung Association offers the following guidelines to help you and your family stay healthy as floodwaters recede:

- **Protect yourself before returning to your building.** During the cleanup, you risk inhaling dust, contaminants and microorganisms, which are unhealthy for anyone to breathe, but especially risky for children, older adults and people with lung diseases. Wear protective clothing, including gloves, rubber boots and a NIOSH-certified N95 mask to protect you from breathing these particles. NOTE: N95 masks must be fitted and are suited only for adults. Ordinary dust masks cannot provide adequate protection.
- **Turn off the electricity and gas at the main location during cleanup.** In addition, do not use portable gasoline- or diesel-powered generators, power washers, grills, camp stoves or other gasoline, propane or charcoal-burning equipment and other devices inside. These produce carbon monoxide that can kill occupants if it builds up indoors.
- **When in doubt, toss it out!** Remove everything that has been soaked by water, including clothing, papers, furnishings, carpet, ceiling tiles and wallboard. Anything that cannot be cleaned and dried and anything porous (like drywall or carpet) that had been in floodwaters for 24 to 48 hours recede must be discarded. Simply drying out water will not remove the bacteria or toxins that can make people sick. Damp buildings and furnishings promote the growth of bacteria, dust mites, cockroaches and

mold, which can aggravate asthma and allergies and may cause the development of asthma, wheeze, cough and other allergic diseases. Dangerous substances in floodwaters can include sewage, chemicals, oil and gas which can saturate materials in the home and give off harmful gases.

- **Use soap and water for cleaning, especially to scrub mold off hard surfaces.** Do not use bleach, which can make it hard to breathe.
- **Consider hiring professional cleaners.** Individuals with lung disease should seek help cleaning their homes and workplaces after floods. And if more than 10 square feet of your home is flooded or if water has been in the building for more than one or two days, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recommends hiring professional cleaners. Flood waters bring in nasty residue that may contaminate porous building materials. Mold flourishes in this environment. Attempting to clean without professional help may increase the risk of developing respiratory problems from these exposures.
- **Do not burn debris or waste,** which adds dangerous pollution to the air. Remove it to a designated disposal area.
- **Keep an eye on symptoms.** It is not uncommon for people to develop health problems after a disaster such as widespread flooding, even if they've never had problems before. Be aware of any breathing problems that may arise, including:
 - Coughing, especially at night
 - Wheezing or feeling short of breath
 - Chest tightness or pain
 - Get immediate emergency medical help if fingernails or lips are turning blue or if there is severe chest pain. Both could be life-threatening.

If you are worried about your family's lung health and have questions, call 1-800-LUNGUSA to talk to an American Lung Association respiratory therapist. More information on how lung health is affected by flooding is available at [Lung.org/flood](https://www.lung.org/flood).

For media interested in speaking with an expert about lung health and floodwaters, contact James Martinez at the American Lung Association at 312-445-2501 or James.Martinez@Lung.org.

###

About the American Lung Association

The American Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease, through research, education and advocacy. The work of the American Lung Association is focused on four strategic imperatives: to defeat lung cancer; to improve the air we breathe; to reduce the burden of lung disease on individuals and their families; and to eliminate tobacco use and tobacco-related diseases. For more information about the American Lung Association, a holder of the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Guide Seal, or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-586-4872) or visit: [Lung.org](https://www.lung.org).

American Lung Association • 55 W. Wacker Drive, Suite 1150 • Chicago, IL 60601
1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-586-4872) [Lung.org](https://www.lung.org)