

# What to do if sewage floods your property



# This leaflet will answer some of your questions and concerns, as well as give you helpful information and advice.

## What we will do for you

Sewer flooding is unpleasant and we treat all cases with the highest priority, so if our sewers have caused the problem we'll offer to clean up affected areas free of charge.

We aim to do this on the same day but this may be impossible if a large area is affected, or if flood waters have not all drained away.

Once waters have receded we'll aim to get to your property within 48 hours. In periods of very bad weather our response times may vary. But don't worry – we'll keep you fully informed of our progress.

Our clean-up service will include, where appropriate:

- Litter picking
- Washing down affected areas
- Pumping out basements
- Disinfection

So we can work out the best solution to the problem, it's really important you tell us each time you're flooded. This means our records are up to date.

## Contacting your insurers

It's important you contact your household insurance provider and tell them about any damage caused by the flooding – you may be able to get a more comprehensive clean-up through them.

Check your level of cover with your insurers now or as soon as possible after the flooding has occurred.

## Are there health risks?

There should be no health risks provided reasonable precautions are taken:

- Keep children and pets away from the flooded areas
- Wash children's hands frequently - particularly after playing outdoors and always before meals.
- Wear protective clothing such as rubber gloves if you're cleaning up and cover up any cuts and grazes
- Food which may have been in contact with flood water should be thrown away
- If you show any symptoms such as diarrhoea or vomiting after a flood, call your doctor straight away.

For further health advice visit Public Health England's website

[www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)

## Will flooding affect my drinking water?

The pipes carrying drinking water around the network are sealed, underground and under pressure so even if there was a leak the pressure forces the clean water out rather than letting other substances in.

But if you have any concerns regarding your drinking water, you can call us 24 hours a day on **0800 316 9800**.

## Cleaning your home

If you decide to clean up the affected area yourself, here are some useful guidelines.

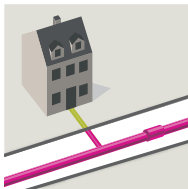
- Use a food-safe disinfectant to wash down kitchen work surfaces and storage areas

- Don't rake or dig soil or grassed areas as this can slow down the action of sunlight in killing off bacteria
- Leave soil used for growing crops unused for 12 months
- Disinfectant can be used on hard surfaces such as paths, drives, patios, decking, furniture and children's toys but it can also kill plants and grass

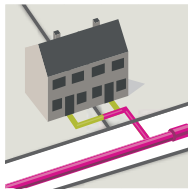
If you've been flooded inside your home or garage, you may want to use low-level heating and open windows to speed up the drying process, but only after the water has receded.

Do not use petrol or diesel generators or equipment indoors as the exhaust fumes are dangerous.

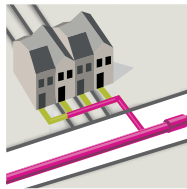
## Who owns your sewer?



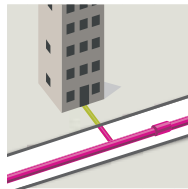
Detached




Semi-detached




Terraced



Flats

 Public sewer/drain – responsibility of the water and sewerage company

 Privately owned – responsibility of the property owner

 Property boundary

## How long should I keep off outdoor flooded areas?

Sunlight helps kill off bacteria but how quickly depends on the weather. As a guide, it takes:

- 9 days when it's warm and dry
- 20 days when it's damp and cool
- 25 days when it's wet and cold

## What causes sewer flooding?

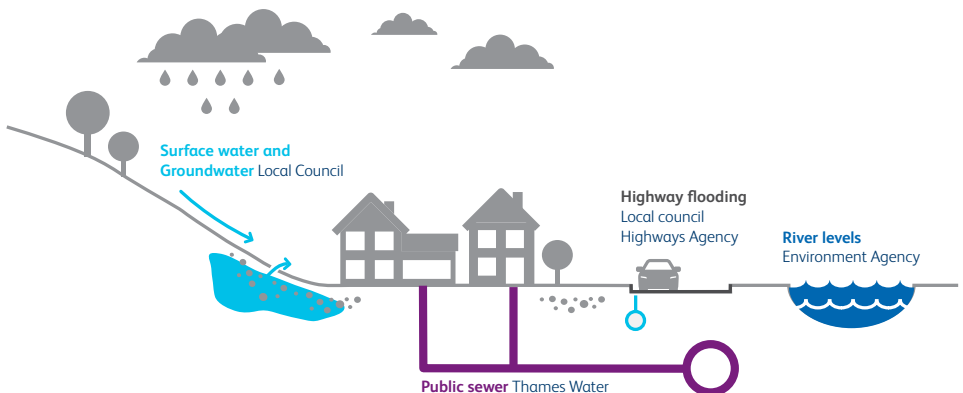
Climate change, population growth and paving over green spaces that provide natural draining – like front gardens – are putting increased pressure on the sewerage network.

This is often made worse by people putting products down the sink or the toilet that clog up the sewers – like fat and grease or wet wipes and nappies.

In many urban areas, the sewers carry not just foul sewage from kitchens and toilets but also rainfall. This means that during a heavy storm the sewers can reach their capacity.

But while they can cope with the vast majority of storms, rainfall can sometimes be so heavy that it overwhelms the system. When this happens, sewage can overflow from manholes and gullies and flood land, rivers and gardens.

## Who's responsible for what?



## Tankers and pumps

In certain circumstances, we use tankers to limit the impact of sewer flooding for customers.

Tankers can only offer limited relief from the symptoms of flooding. When used for extended periods in villages and close to homes they can also cause considerable noise and disruption.

If possible we will use temporary pumps.

We prioritise the use of tankers to protect our customers suffering from, or at risk of, internal flooding, rather than attempting to pump away river water and groundwater, against which they could not make any significant impact.

## Portaloos and sandbags

People should contact their local flood authority, often the local council, for advice on toilet facilities and sandbags as they may be able to provide them.

We use sandbags to protect our pumps and sewage treatment sites from floodwater to minimise the impact of flooding on our customers' properties but we do not routinely offer them to protect customers' homes.

We're really sympathetic to those who are unable to use their toilet facilities and we will work with the local authorities to assist in the restoration of your facilities.

## Our promise to you

If the inside of your property has been flooded with wastewater from our public sewer we'll automatically credit your Thames Water account with your annual wastewater service charge (up to a maximum of £1,000 or a minimum of £150).

If the outside of your property has been flooded with wastewater from our public sewer and you have suffered damage, financial loss or loss of amenity you can claim half your annual wastewater service charge (up to a maximum of £500 or a minimum of £75). Please phone us on **0800 316 9800** to get a claim form.

## What happens next?

If we can't find the cause of the flooding when we first visit your property, we'll carry out investigations and get back to you within 30 working days. We'll then let you know what caused the flood and how we're going to put things right.

# Who to contact

## Thames Water

To report an urgent sewer-related matter call our 24-hour customer service team on **0800 316 9800** or log on to **thameswater.co.uk**

Textphone service for the deaf or hard of hearing

This service is available for customers who have hearing problems.

Please note, voice calls or mobile numbers aren't accepted via this 24-hour number – **0800 316 9898**.

## Local authority

To report groundwater property flooding and flooding from the roads or problems with highway gullies or ditches, contact your local council.

## Environment Agency

If available for your neighbourhood, sign up for free flood warning messages from the Environment Agency to receive phone, text or email messages about when flooding is expected **www.gov.uk/sign-up-for-flood-warnings** or call Floodline on **0345 988 1188**.

If rivers have burst their banks and it's affecting you, contact the Environment Agency on **0800 807060**.

To report pollution incidents, river flooding or water quality issues, contact the 24-hour Environment Agency incident hotline on **0800 807060**.

If your property is flooded by river water, contact your home insurer as soon as possible.

## Public Health England

For any information relating to public health, visit its website **www.hpa.org.uk**.

## Flood preparation

For advice on preparing for a flood visit **www.gov.uk/prepare-for-a-flood**