

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Protect Yourself And Your Family: Important Information For USVI Hurricane Survivors

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ST. CROIX -- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on Wednesday issued safety guidelines aimed at protecting the lives of hurricane survivors who may become exposed to certain hazards caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The guidelines are on safe drinking water, food, and even how to clean one's home, among other tips. See them below.

The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority's (WAPA) boil water advisory remains in effect for potable water across the territory. Don't use water straight from the tap to drink, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, make ice, or prepare baby formula.

The USVI Department of Health (DOH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offer the following steps to stay safe during this difficult time:

Use bottled water for drinking, cooking, and brushing teeth

- If you do not have bottled water, boil or disinfect your water:
 - How to boil: Heat water to a rolling boil for at least a minute.
 - How to disinfect: Add 8 drops of household bleach to 1 gallon of clear water or 16 drops to cloudy water. Wait 30 minutes before drinking.
- Boil or disinfect cistern water a gallon or less at a time.

Keep your hands clean to prevent the spread of bacteria/diseases

- Wash your hands with soap and clean water often (always before meals and after using the bathroom). If you do not have soap and clean water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Eat safe food

- Throw away food that may have come in contact with flood or stormwater, perishable foods, and those with an unusual odor, color, or texture.
- When in doubt, throw it out.

Be safe while cleaning up

- Never touch a power line.
- Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless gas that can sudden illness and death. To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning, keep generators at least 20 feet from buildings and use a carbon monoxide detector.
- If using a chainsaw, follow the manufacturer's safety instructions and make sure others stand back.
- When cleaning mold, wear goggles, gloves, boots, and a NIOSH-approved N95 respirator (available at hardware stores).

Protect yourself from mosquitoes

- Use EPA-approved repellent that contains oil of lemon eucalyptus, Picaridin, IR3535, or DEET.
- Cover or dump out standing water where mosquitoes could lay eggs.
- Keep doors closed and repair window screens.
- If exposed to mosquitoes while sleeping, wear repellent and/or use a mosquito net.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.

The Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) advises the public to be cautious when using the coastal waters throughout the territory until further notice. There may be an elevated health risk to anyone swimming in storm water-impacted areas as a result of increased concentrations of bacteria.

People should also be aware that stormwater runoff due to hurricanes and tropical storms may also contain contaminants or pollutants harmful to human health due to storm debris. Areas of stormwater runoff, such as puddles and drainage basins, should

be avoided.

FEMA personnel remain on the ground across the territory and continue to coordinate efforts with the governor's office and the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA). Here are some additional safety tips you can follow to ensure life safety:

- Heavy rains are still possible. Listen to local officials for updates and instructions during any flooding event or other emergency.
- Emergency crews continue to remove debris, clear downed power lines, and restore communications capabilities on the islands. You can help them by staying off the roads and out of the way as much as possible. It is important to obey curfews.

Territory-wide curfew

Government officials would like to remind everyone that a curfew remains in effect for all of the U.S. Virgin Islands:

- On St. Croix the curfew is daily from 7 p.m. to 8 a.m.
- On St. Thomas and St. John the curfew is daily from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m.

Driving safely

Driving at night is extremely dangerous with traffic lights out. In addition, downed powerlines and debris can remain on the roads since the storms.

- Drive slowly, carefully, and have patience. It is a stressful time for everyone as Virgin Island communities gets back to routine.
- Be mindful of pedestrians. Curfews may increase the number of pedestrians on the streets. Take extra care to watch out for pedestrians.
- Turn around, don't drown. Driving through a flooded area can be extremely hazardous and almost half of all flash flood deaths happen in vehicles. When in your car, look out for flooding in low-lying areas, at bridges and at highway dips. As little as six inches of water may cause you to lose control of your vehicle.

Additional resources

More information from the USVI Department of Health:

www.facebook.com/virginislandsdoh and doh.vi.gov.

The CDC website includes information regarding mold health hazards as well as prevention, clean up and remediation guidance:

- English: www.cdc.gov/mold/cleanup-guide.html
- Spanish: www.cdc.gov/mold/es/cleanup-guide.html

More information on drinking safe water is available at:

- English: www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/pdf/16_262392-a_drink-safe-water_flyer_eng_508.pdf

- Spanish: www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/pdf/16_262392-b_drink-safe-water_spflyer_508.pdf

More information on food and water safety is available at:

- English: www.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater/facts.html
- Spanish: www.cdc.gov/es/disasters/hurricanes/foodwater.html
- Haitian-Creole: www.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater/pdfs/KeepFoodWaterSafe_Haitian_Creole.pdf

More information on safely using generators is available at:

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