

# Fact Sheet

## IF SEWAGE BACKS UP IN YOUR HOME

Occasionally, sanitary sewer pipes fail or become blocked, causing sewage to back-up through plumbing fixtures such as basement set tubs, toilets, etc. If you reside in Saranac Lake, you should **FIRST CALL THE VILLAGE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS ANYTIME, DAY OR NIGHT, at 891-4160.**

The Water and Sewer Department will immediately send someone out to investigate your problem. If they determine that your backup is due to a blockage in the Village's main sewer (the sewer in the street) their investigator will arrange for a Village crew to relieve the blockage by cleaning and repairing the main sewer.

However, if the investigator finds that the blockage is not in the main sewer, he will inform you that the problem is in your house connection to the sewer line that runs from your house to the main sewer in the street. *Since maintenance of the house connection line is the home owner's responsibility*, the investigator will advise you to hire a plumber or sewer rodder to clean your house connection.

## Handling Sewage and Fecal Matter Safely

Plumbers, custodians, groundskeepers, even the casual pedestrian can come in contact with fecal matter unexpectedly. Sewage spills, plumbing malfunctions, people relieving themselves in inappropriate places, and inconsiderate pet owners are some of the causes of this problem.

### Dangers of Exposure

The greatest danger of exposure to fecal matter is the possibility of it entering your mouth and then getting into your digestive system. While most people would never knowingly ingest this matter, not using proper hygiene after contact with fecal matter or sewage can create a path for microorganisms to enter.

Hand-to-mouth exposure to fecal matter can cause illnesses such as Salmonellosis and Hepatitis A. Salmonellosis is a bacterial disease whose symptoms include abdominal pain, diarrhea, nausea, and sometimes vomiting. Hepatitis A symptoms include fever, malaise, anorexia, nausea, and abdominal discomfort, followed within a few days by jaundice. It can be a mild illness lasting 1-2 weeks or a disabling disease lasting several months.

The possibility of contracting life-threatening diseases such as Hepatitis B or AIDS is extremely remote, as the fecal-oral route cannot transmit Hepatitis B or HIV.

## How to Protect Yourself

The two main ways of protecting yourself from fecal matter are following good hygiene practices and using personal protective equipment.

### Good Hygiene

- Do not touch fecal matter with bare hands. If you need to remove it, wear waterproof gloves and use an instrument such as tongs or a spade for picking it up.
- Do not smoke, eat, drink, apply lip treatments, or chew gum while cleaning up fecal matter.
- Reduce exposure by keeping those who are not properly protected from coming in contact with the material. Close the area to any use pending clearance.
- Clean everything, including clothes, tools, and footwear, that came in contact with the fecal matter. Use a bleach solution as described below.
- Wash your hands thoroughly even if you were wearing gloves the whole time. Use plenty of soap, scrub for at least 30 seconds, and rinse thoroughly with warm water. Frequent, routine hand washing is the most important safeguard in preventing infection by agents present in sewage.

### Clearance

**You will need two bleach solutions to properly clean items and living space contaminated with sewage and fecal matter**

- **Preparation of a 1:100 household bleach solution (1%):** Household bleach usually contains 5% chlorine. A 1:100 diluted household bleach solution is effective to disinfect bedding, drapes and items that can be cleaned in hot soapy water afterwards. To make a 1:100 diluted household bleach solution from household bleach of 5% chlorine, you should add 100ml (approximately half of an ordinary water glass) of household bleach into 10 L (approximately 1 full household bucket) of cool water. (Chlorine is more effective in cool water.). If chlorine concentration of household bleach is unknown, it is advised to follow the use instructions on its package.
- **Preparation of a 1:10 household bleach solution (10%):** Household bleach usually contains 5% chlorine. A 1:10 diluted household bleach solution is effective to disinfect floors and surfaces in direct contact with sewage and fecal matter, and make them safer for use. To make a 1:10 diluted household bleach solution from household bleach of 5% chlorine, add 100ml of household bleach into 1 L of cool water. (Chlorine is more effective in cool water.). If chlorine concentration of household bleach is unknown, it is advised to follow the use instructions on its package. *A 1:10 diluted household bleach solution is caustic, handle with care. Avoid direct contact of eyes and skin.*
- **Prepare the bleach solutions in a well-ventilated area.**
- **Bleach solutions must be prepared daily.** They lose strength after 24 hours. Anytime the odor of chlorine is not present, discard the solution.

- **Tableware, cooking and eating utensils** should be boiled for over 30 minutes. For those utensils that cannot be heated or boiled, they can be soaked in 1:100 diluted household bleach solution for 30 minutes (to allow complete disinfection). Then, rinse them in boiled water and let them air-dry.
- **Keys, toys, telephones and other articles that are frequently touched** should be wiped with 1:100 diluted household bleach solution. Leave them for 5-10 minutes (to allow complete disinfection), rinse and then wipe dry.
- **Bedding, clothing and towels** should be completely soaked in 1:100 diluted household bleach solution for 30 minutes. Remove the items from the bleach solution and soak in soapy water and then wash laundry as usual. Let them air-dry.
- **Contaminated building floors, walls and countertops that had direct contact with sewage and fecal matter** should be scrubbed with a 1:10 solution. Be sure there is good ventilation for the chlorine fumes. Allow carpets and floors to dry, before regular mopping or carpet shampooing.

Clean the site using the cleaning methods described above until all visible sewage has been removed and no sewage odor is present.

DO NOT USE other cleaning solutions like Tile and Tub Cleaner with the bleach solution. This could result in the creation of dangerous fumes.

Once the area has been cleaned as described above, it can then be reopened for use.

## **Personal Protection**

Another way to protect yourself against illness is by keeping your tetanus-diphtheria (Td) immunization current. "Current" means a booster shot within the last ten years (for those who have completed the basic series of three immunizations, usually given in childhood).

If you have questions about how to handle fecal matter safely or about other sanitation issues, contact the Village of Saranac Lake Department of Public Works at 891-4160 or the Village of Saranac Lake Public Health Officer at 891-4150.