

Gateway Water & Mold: The Real Risks of Staying Home After a Sewage Backup

When a sewage backup hits your home, the first instinct is often to stay put. You might think, "It's just a little water. I'll clean it up tomorrow." But the reality is far more serious. Sewage backups are not just a plumbing inconvenience; they are a major health and safety event. The question of whether it is safe to stay home after a sewage backup is one that every homeowner in Greater St. Louis should take seriously, and it is a topic Gateway Water & Mold addresses directly in their educational video for the community.

The short answer is: no, it is generally not safe to stay in your home after a significant sewage backup, especially if the affected area is not immediately isolated and professionally remediated. The risks come from a combination of biological hazards, structural concerns, and the long-term threat of mold growth. Understanding these risks can help you make a more informed decision for your family. [Gateway Water & Mold](#)

What Is in Sewage Water?

Sewage is classified into two main types: black water and grey water. Black water comes from toilets and contains human waste, which is loaded with bacteria, viruses, and parasites. Grey water comes from sinks, showers, and washing machines, and while it is less hazardous, it still contains soap, food particles, and other organic matter that can support bacterial growth. When a sewer line backs up into your home, you are typically dealing with a mix of both, often referred to simply as sewage backup. The water can contain everything from E. coli and salmonella to hepatitis A and norovirus. These pathogens can survive on surfaces for days or even weeks.

Health Risks from Pathogens

The immediate concern after a sewage backup is the airborne and surface-borne contamination. When the water recedes, it leaves behind a film of biological material. As it dries, particles can become airborne, especially if you start sweeping or using a household fan. Inhaling these particles can lead to respiratory infections, gastrointestinal illness, or skin infections if you come into direct contact. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns that exposure to raw sewage can cause serious illness, particularly for children, the elderly, and anyone with a weakened immune system. If you have a basement flooding event with sewage, the risks multiply because basements often have limited ventilation, trapping contaminants in the air.

Indoor Air Quality and Mold Growth

Beyond the immediate pathogens, one of the most insidious long-term problems is the effect on indoor air quality. Sewage backups introduce massive amounts of moisture into your home's structure. Even after the visible water is removed, moisture remains trapped in drywall, wood, carpet, and insulation. This creates a perfect breeding ground for mold. Mold spores are naturally present in the air, but when they find a damp environment, they colonize rapidly. Within 24 to 48 hours, you can see visible mold growth. The Environmental Protection Agency emphasizes that mold can cause allergic reactions, asthma attacks, and other respiratory issues. Mold remediation is not a simple cleaning task; it often requires cutting out affected materials, treating the area with antimicrobial agents, and ensuring the space is completely dry before rebuilding.

This is where the expertise of a company like Gateway Water & Mold becomes critical. They offer 24/7 service for sewage cleanup and water damage, which means they can respond quickly to begin the drying and sanitization process. The faster the response, the lower the chance of mold taking hold. Their video on staying home after a backup likely emphasizes that even if you feel fine initially, the mold problem can develop weeks later, making the home uninhabitable for much longer.

Structural Damage and Hidden Hazards

Sewage water does not just stay on the floor. It wicks up into drywall, baseboards, and subflooring. It can soak into the framing of your house. Over time, this moisture can rot wood, corrode metal fasteners, and weaken the structural integrity of your home. In a basement flooding scenario, the water might also carry silt and debris that clog drainage systems and create long-term drainage issues. The St. Louis Metropolitan Sewer District often deals with combined sewer systems that can be overwhelmed during heavy rains, leading to backups. If you live in an area prone to such events, you should have a plan in place for professional cleanup.

The Role of Professional Restoration

The Restoration Industry has developed specific protocols for dealing with sewage backups. A professional team will first extract all standing water using a pump truck and wet vacuums. Then they will remove all porous materials that cannot be fully sanitized, such as carpet, padding, and drywall below the water line. They will use industrial-grade disinfectants and antimicrobial treatments. In some cases, they may use hydro excavation techniques to clean out drains and remove contaminated soil from around the foundation. Finally, they will set up industrial dehumidifiers and air movers to dry the structure completely. This is not a job for a mop and bucket.

When Is It Safe to Stay?

There are very limited situations where staying home might be acceptable. If the sewage backup is contained to a small, non-living area like a utility closet with a concrete floor, and you can isolate that room from the rest of the house, you might be able to remain in the home while professionals work. But even then, the risk of airborne contaminants spreading through the HVAC system is real. If the backup is in a finished basement that is connected to the rest of the house, or if the water has reached living spaces, it is almost always safer to leave until the cleanup and drying are complete. The decision should be based on the extent of the contamination, the ventilation of the space, and the health of the occupants. A Plumbing Emergency like this demands professional judgment.

What to Do Immediately

If you experience a sewage backup, the first step is to stop using all water in the house to prevent more sewage from entering. Turn off the circuit breaker to any flooded areas if it is safe to do so. Do not walk through the water if you can avoid it, and keep children and pets away. Call a professional 24/7 service like Gateway Water & Mold immediately. While you wait, open windows if you can do so safely to increase ventilation. Do not attempt to clean the water yourself with household cleaners; they are not strong enough to kill the pathogens in raw sewage. Document the damage with photos for insurance purposes, but prioritize your health over property.

Insurance and Long-Term Considerations

Most standard homeowners insurance policies do not cover sewage backup damage. You often need a separate rider or endorsement. Check your policy and contact your agent as soon as possible. The cost of professional sewage cleanup and mold remediation can run into thousands of dollars, but it is an investment in your health and your home's value. Cutting corners can lead to recurring mold problems that are more expensive to fix later. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Environmental Protection Agency both provide guidelines on safe cleanup after flooding, but they strongly recommend professional help for sewage contamination.

Final Thoughts

No one wants to leave their home after a disaster, but a sewage backup is a serious health incident. The risks of infection, respiratory illness, and long-term structural damage are too high to ignore. The best approach is to have a plan, know who to call, and be prepared to vacate if the situation warrants it. For homeowners in Greater St. Louis, having a trusted partner for both sewage cleanup and water damage restoration can make all the difference in

how quickly you can return to normal. The video from Gateway Water & Mold provides a clear, practical look at this decision, and it is worth watching before you ever face the problem. Stay safe, act fast, and let the professionals handle the dirty work.