

Sewer failure & toilets without service

ACTION CHECKLIST

Stop using plumbing that is backing up or may discharge sewage into living areas. Keep children and pets away from contaminated water. Separate toilet waste from drinking water, food and washing areas, and use a contained temporary toilet arrangement until safe disposal and service are established. Do not flush blindly during a sewer disruption.

[] Check for backup

If drains or toilets back up, stop adding water and keep clear of the affected area. Do not operate electrical equipment in standing water.

[] Keep clean supplies separate

Protect drinking-water containers and food. Use a designated clean handwashing area with safe water and soap.

[] Use a contained temporary option

Use a purpose-made portable or camping toilet according to instructions, or a sturdy lidded container with appropriate leak-resistant liners as a temporary arrangement. Keep it stable and away from children.

[] Handle waste cautiously

Wear gloves when available, close liners securely and prevent leaks. Wash hands after handling and before food preparation. Keep waste away from water sources.

[] Confirm disposal

Use an established safe disposal service or locally appropriate sanitation guidance. Do not dump waste into streets, rivers, storm drains or open ground.

WATCH FOR

Bleach does not make sewage floodwater safe to enter. Never mix cleaning chemicals. Contamination and infection risks are greater for children and immunocompromised people.

IF HELP IS UNAVAILABLE

If no collection is operating, contain waste securely in a protected place away from living, food and water areas while seeking a verified disposal option. Do not improvise an open discharge that endangers neighbours.

Updated 2026-10-02 | Civilian educational guidance. Seek qualified help when reachable and safe; do not delay immediate protective action.

Full guide: <https://ospreyzero.com/emergencies/sewer-failure/>

CDC · Personal hygiene during an emergency

