

Harris County

**HCPHES**

Public Health & Environmental Services

# Hurricane Ike Recovery: Parents

SEPTEMBER 2008

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- After a Hurricane: Understanding Your Child's Behavior and Helping Them to Recover
- Respiratory and Diarrheal Illness to Watch For
- Preventing Injuries to Children Post Hurricane
- Beware of Bites!
- Importance of Handwashing



Small victims can be big challenges.

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[www.hcphe.org](http://www.hcphe.org)

As we begin to get back to normal after Hurricane Ike, Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services (HCPHES) wants to make key resources easy to get to via this newsletter. Please share with other parents.

HCPHES knows that you care about the health of your child. As schools re-open and families begin to get back to their routines, it is important to keep in mind that your child may need some extra attention.

With hurricane season only halfway over, it is important to be prepared before the next storm. For more information, visit [www.hcphe.org](http://www.hcphe.org).



## After a Hurricane: Your Child's Behavior

Disasters can leave children feeling frightened, confused, and insecure. For a lot of children, reactions to disasters are brief and represent normal reactions to "abnormal events."

Whether a child has personally experienced trauma, has merely seen the event on television, or has heard it discussed by adults, it is important for parents to be informed and ready to help if reactions to stress begin to occur.

Source: [http://www.fema.gov/rebuild/recover/cope\\_child.shtm](http://www.fema.gov/rebuild/recover/cope_child.shtm)

**Children may exhibit these behaviors after a disaster:**

- Be upset over the loss of a favorite toy, blanket, teddy bear or other things that adults might consider insignificant, but which are important to the child.

It is important to keep in mind that some children may not show signs of distress because they do not feel upset, but they may still need your help. Other children may not show signs of being upset for many weeks or even months.

- Become afraid of wind, rain or sudden loud noises.
- Be afraid the event will reoccur.
- Change from being quiet, obedient and caring to loud, noisy and aggressive or may change from being outgoing to shy and afraid.
- Develop nighttime fears. They may be afraid to sleep alone at night, with the light off, to sleep in their own room, or have nightmares or bad dreams.
- Become easily upset, crying and whining.

- Lose trust in adults. After all, their adults were not able to control the disaster.
- Not wanting parents out of their sight and refuse to go to school or childcare.
- Revert to younger behavior such as bed wetting and thumb sucking.
- Feel guilty that they caused the disaster because of something they had said or done.
- Have symptoms of illness, such as headaches, vomiting or fever.
- Worry about where they and their family will live.

Source: [http://www.fema.gov/kids/tch\\_mntl.htm](http://www.fema.gov/kids/tch_mntl.htm)

Protect your children.  
Protect your community.  
**Stay healthy and safe.**

**“Children who experience an initial traumatic event before they are 11 years old are three times more likely to develop psychological symptoms than those who experience their first trauma as a teenager or later. But children are able to cope better with a traumatic event if parents, friends, family, teachers and other adults support and help them with their experiences. Help should start as soon as possible after the event.”**

Source: [http://www.fema.gov/kids/tch\\_mntl.htm](http://www.fema.gov/kids/tch_mntl.htm)

## Things Parents Can Do to Help Children Cope

- Talk with the children about how they are feeling and listen without judgment.
- Let the children take their time to figure things out and to show their feelings. Do not rush them or pretend that they do not think or feel as they do.
- Help them learn to use words that express their feelings, such as happy, sad, angry, mad and scared. Just be sure the words fit their feelings - not yours.
- Assure fearful children that you will be there to take care of them. Reassure them many times.
- Stay together as a family as much as possible.
- Go back as soon as possible to former routines or develop new ones. Maintain a regular schedule for the children and include them in planning routines and outings.
- Reassure the children that the disaster was not their fault in any way.
- Remember to take care of yourself so you can take care of your children.
- Children should not be expected to be brave or tough, or to "not cry."
- Allow the children to grieve losses.
- Do not give children more information than they can handle about the disaster. Limit their exposure to additional trauma, including news reports.
- Do not be afraid to "spoil" children in this period after a disaster.
- Children cope better when they are healthy, so be sure your children get needed healthcare as soon as possible.
- Make sure the children are getting healthy meals and eating enough food and getting enough rest.
- Let them have some control, such as choosing what outfit to wear or what meal to have for dinner.
- Help your children know that others love them and care about them by visiting, talking on the phone or writing to family members, friends and neighbors.
- Encourage the children to give or send pictures they have drawn or things they have written.
- Help your children regain faith in the future by helping them develop plans for activities that will take place later - next week, next month.
- Spend extra time with your children at bedtime. Read stories, rub their backs, listen to music, talk quietly about the day.
- If you will be away for a time, tell them where you are going and make sure you return or call at the time you say you will.
- Find ways to emphasize to the children that you love them.

Source: [http://www.fema.gov/kids/tch\\_aft.htm](http://www.fema.gov/kids/tch_aft.htm)

**Disaster-related Crisis Counseling  
713-970-7000**

**1-800-969-6642  
[www.nmha.org/reassurance](http://www.nmha.org/reassurance)**

## Activities for the Kids

1. Encourage the children to draw or paint pictures of how they feel about their experiences. Hang these at the child's level to be seen easily.
2. Write a story of the frightening event. You might start with: Once upon a time there was a terrible \_\_\_\_\_ and it scared us all \_\_\_\_\_. This is what happened: \_\_\_\_\_. Be sure to end with "And we are now safe."
3. Playing with playdough or clay is good for children to release tension and make symbolic creations.
4. Music is fun and valuable for children. Creating music with instruments or rhythm toys helps relieve stress and tension.
5. Provide the children with clothes, shoes, hats, etc. so they can play "dress up" and can pretend to be adults in charge of recovering from the disaster and "being in charge."
6. Make puppets with the children and put on a puppet show for family and friends, or help children put on a skit about what they experienced.

## A Few Illnesses to Watch For

### ASTHMA

Due to all the power outs and flooding in our area, children who have asthma may have an increase in asthma attacks due to:

- Exposure to indoor and outdoor allergy triggers from trees, mold, and smoke from burning debris
- Not having access to nebulizers and pharmacy or doctors to obtain medicine, which makes it hard to manage asthma
- Stress which can increase number of asthma attacks

#### What you need to do:

- If your child takes asthma medicine or needs nebulizer treatments, be sure to provide them to the child as required.
- Remove allergy triggers, like mold or wet pillows and beds from the house, or if you can't do that, then remove your child from the area that makes breathing hard.
- If your child has a severe asthma attack, be sure to see your doctor right away.

### INFLUENZA (FLU)

As we are nearing flu season, remember to protect yourself and your children against the flu. The best time to get the flu shot is in October or November but you can get vaccinated in December or later.

Those who should get a flu shot include:

- Children 6 months to 5 years of age;
- Children with high risk conditions and chronic disease such as asthma, immune suppression, diabetes and sickle cell anemia;
- Adults 50 years of age and older;
- Adults with high risk conditions such as diabetes;
- Adults who take care of children such teachers;
- Healthcare workers; and
- Women who are pregnant during flu season.

**Talk to your health care provider or visit HCPHES clinic to obtain your flu shot.**

#### Additional resources to check-out:

Protect Yourself from the Flu <http://www.hcpheh.org/flu/Flu%20Vaccine%20Brochure%20for%20Adults%20Rev.2.pdf>

Protect Your Child Against The Flu <http://www.hcpheh.org/flu/Flu%20Vaccine%20Brochure%20for%20Parents.pdf>

### "STOMACH FLU"

After a hurricane, there may be an increase in gastroenteritis or "stomach flu".

This disease can cause diarrhea with or without vomiting and a "stomach ache." Many germs can cause the stomach flu, including viruses, bacteria and parasites. For most people, it is not a serious illness. Infants, young children, seniors and those who have immune system problems are at risk for dehydration from loss of fluids. This may lead to other health problems.

**Children can expose other vulnerable people in their household to germs. Be sure to remind them to wash their hands frequently.**

**Symptoms** often begin 1 to 2 days following infection, and lasts for 1 to 10 days, and may include:

- Diarrhea (watery or bloody)
- Vomiting
- Headache, fever and muscle aches
- Abdominal cramps

#### Prevention

- Wash hands (and encourage handwashing) often - especially after using the bathroom or changing diapers.
- Wash hands more often when helping someone who has diarrhea or vomiting.
- Avoid shaking hands.
- Use alcohol-based hand cleaners when soap & water are not nearby.
- Stay away from sewage that can be found in yards and inside homes.

#### What to do if you or someone in your family gets sick

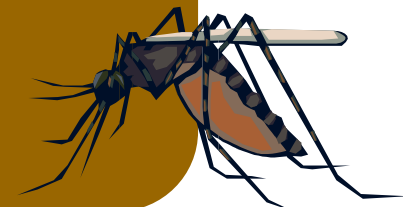
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Wash hands often.
- Set aside toilets for persons with diarrhea.
- Use plastic bags to catch vomit, clean up vomit and stool quickly using a disinfectant and do not help prepare or serve food.

## Fight the Bite!

When outdoors (especially between the hours of dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active), use an insect repellent containing DEET, Picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, or IR3535 (for example, Skin So Soft Bug Guard Plus). Apply as directed on the label. Do not allow children to put repellent on themselves.

Wear light colored, long sleeved clothing and long pants when outdoors during peak mosquito biting times. Remove/empty containers that can hold water such as flowerpots, buckets, tires, toys and plastic swimming pools. Keep rain gutters clear and draining.

Repellents and sunscreens can both be used at the same time. It is recommended that sunscreen is applied first and then repellent. Using a product that combines sunscreen with a repellent is not recommended. Always apply both products as directed on the label.





## Beware of Bites!

Children should take the following precautions recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and the Humane Society of the United States:

### Things to Remember with Dogs (and All Animals)

- Ask permission before petting someone else's dog.
- Leave mother animals and their young alone.
- Do not try to pet dogs that are tied up, sleeping, eating, behind fences, or in vehicles.
- Do not chase or tease dogs, or pull their ears or tails.
- Do not grab their food, bones or toys.
- Do not try to stop a fight. Call an adult for help.
- Always act kindly and gently. Animals have feelings too.
- Remember that cats can bite and scratch unexpectedly.
- Leave wild animals alone.
- Report the details of injured, stray and threatening animals to an adult .

**HCPHES Veterinary Public Health has seen a 250% increase in bite cases since the landfall of Hurricane Ike-- that's over 70 reported animal bites in 6 days!**

### How to Act Around a Stray or Loose Dog

- Do not pet strays or dogs running loose.
- Stand still (Stand like a Tree).
- Let the dog sniff you.
- Do not stare at the dog. Dogs view this as aggressive behavior.
- Do not turn your back and run.
- If the dog is barking or growling, slowly walk away, backwards or sideways, keeping the dog in view.

## Prevent Injuries

- Never touch downed power lines and report downed lines by calling **CenterPoint Energy** at **713-207-2222**
- Do not climb on or play around downed trees that may be unstable or have power lines tangled in them
- Do not allow children to play near damaged buildings or structures, as they may be unstable
- Avoid picking up dead animals, and stay away from stray animals to avoid bites and rabies exposure
- Children can drown in as little as one inch of water. Turn over or remove any containers which may collect water
- Pay special attention to swimming pools, which may contain murky water and pose a drowning hazard for young children
- Do not allow children to play in standing water. It may contain fecal matter and be a breeding ground for mosquitoes
- Check playgrounds for sharp objects and other storm related debris on the grounds
- Use battery-powered lanterns and flashlights instead of candles to reduce fire hazards. If you must use candles, make sure they are in safe holders and kept away from curtains, paper, wood, and other flammable items

*"The majority of children are ages 5-12 years... common injuries are broken bones, head injuries, and lacerations. This is due to...children that are:*

- *out of school,*
- *without power ...,*
- *lack of parental supervision because adults are busy with clean-up and restoration efforts."*

*—Safe Kids Greater Houston*

- If you must walk outdoors at night, carry a flashlight, wear light colors or reflective clothing, and walk on sidewalks to avoid cars that may not be able to see you.



## Importance of Handwashing

### Encourage Good Handwashing Habits!

Keeping hands clean is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others.

### When to Wash

It is especially important to wash your hands:

- Before, during, and after you prepare food - especially raw meat, poultry, seafood products, eggs, and fresh produce;
- Before you eat;
- Before and after changing a baby's diaper;
- After you use the bathroom;
- After handling animals or animal waste;
- After sneezing, coughing, or using a handkerchief or tissue;
- After touching any part of the body the hair of face area, scratching any part of the body, licking the hands, etc.
- After handling garbage or trash; or
- Whenever your hands are dirty.

### How to Wash

How you wash your hands is just as important as when you wash them, especially when it comes to eliminating germs. Just rinsing hands quickly is not enough. Follow these steps when you wash your hands:

- **WET** your hands with warm water. Apply plenty of SOAP.
- **SCRUB** your hands together vigorously for at least 20 seconds. Wash the front and back of your hands, between your fingers and under your nails. Scrubbing your hands together loosens germs and dirt and allows them to be washed away.
- **RINSE** your hands.
- **DRY** your hands with a paper towel.
- **TURN OFF THE WATER** with a paper towel.

Unsure about how to be sure you have scrubbed for 20 seconds? Try singing "Happy Birthday" to yourself twice while washing your hands.

**Remember:** If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based gel to clean hands.

- When using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer:
- Apply product to the palm of one hand;
- Rub hands together; and
- Rub the product over all surfaces of hands and fingers until hands are dry.

