OTTAWA FLOOD RESTORATION

Sewer Backup Cleanup

Sewer backups: contaminated water, protective gear, who should not do cleanup, and what the City grant covers

6 Expert Answers from Flood Repair IQ

ottawafloodrestoration.ca/construction-brain

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Q1

Does a sewer backup mean the walls in my Vanier basement come out?

Whether the walls come out depends on how high the sewage reached and how long it sat, not on the fact of a sewer backup alone.

Health Canada says to remove finished walls completely if the water level was several feet high, if it took many days or longer before the water was drained, or if the area was very humid for an extended period. Ottawa Public Health adds that porous, wet building materials such as drywall and insulation should be removed and discarded. If the backup was shallow and cleared quickly, a contractor may find that only the lower section of wall needs to come out, but that is a judgment made on site, not in advance.

The sewage question matters separately. Ottawa Public Health says to treat floodwater and any surface it touched as contaminated. Health Canada says children, pregnant women and people with respiratory problems should never handle water and materials contaminated by sewage, and recommends gloves, eye protection, a mask and rubber boots for anyone who does. Because of that contamination, a contractor will look at whether the wall cavity was reached, not just the surface.

A few things shape the scope of work in your specific case:

- how high the sewage rose on the wall
- how long it sat before cleanup began
- whether the wall cavity, insulation or framing shows any sign of saturation or mould
- the age and construction of the wall (properties built before 1990 may have asbestos, so check with a professional before any demolition work)

On the financial side, the City of Ottawa's Compassionate Grant provides a $1,000 payment to homeowners affected by basement flooding due to sewer surcharging, provided you meet the eligibility conditions and apply within one year of the flooding event. It does not apply to overland flooding through a foundation crack or leaking window well.
Ask the contractor for an itemized quote that spells out exactly what comes out, how the space is dried, and what materials go back in.

Q2

What protective gear do I need for sewer backup cleanup in Ottawa?

Health Canada recommends gloves, eye protection, a mask, and rubber boots when handling water and materials contaminated by sewage. Health Canada also notes that children, pregnant women, and people with respiratory problems should never handle sewage-contaminated water and materials.

Beyond the gear itself, how you approach the cleanup matters. Ottawa Public Health says to always treat floodwater and surfaces that have been in contact with floodwater as contaminated. That applies to everything the sewage touched: drywall, insulation, flooring, and any porous materials. Ottawa Public Health and Health Canada both say to remove and discard porous, wet building materials such as drywall, insulation, and carpet that have been exposed to floodwater and cannot be dried.

A few things worth knowing before you start:

- Health Canada says your house and furnishings are less likely to grow mould if they are dried within 48 hours.
- For mould found during cleanup, Ottawa Public Health says homeowners may clean small patches of three square metres or less. A larger area, or any situation where sewage was involved and mould has developed in wall or ceiling cavities, calls for a professional. ottawaabatement.com covers mould removal work in Ottawa.
- Health Canada says that for sewage-contaminated flood water specifically, a professional should handle the work if you fall into a higher-risk group.

If you are thinking about what comes out and what gets discarded, Health Canada says to dispose of all insulation, drywall, carpets, and similar materials that have been exposed to floodwater and cannot be dried. That is not a judgment call to make on the fly; it is worth having a contractor confirm what needs to go before you start pulling things apart.
One practical note: if your home was built before 1990, the City of Ottawa says to check with a professional before doing any repair or demolition work, because properties of that age may contain asbestos.

Before you begin any hands-on work, confirm with a contractor what the full scope of the sewage-affected area is, so you know exactly what you are dealing with.

Q3

Sewage came up through the floor drain in my Alta Vista house. Is cleanup different?

Sewage backup cleanup is handled differently from a clean-water flood, and the difference matters for every step that follows.

Ottawa Public Health says to always consider floodwater, and surfaces that have been in contact with it, to be contaminated, and Health Canada says you must take special precautions if your house is flooded with sewage. Ottawa Public Health says to remove and discard porous, wet building materials such as drywall, insulation and ceiling tiles that have been in contact with floodwater. Health Canada says flooring soaked by flood water should be removed and discarded.

Protective gear is recommended throughout: gloves, eye protection, a mask and rubber boots. Health Canada notes that children, pregnant women and people with respiratory problems should never handle water and materials contaminated by sewage. If anyone in your household is in those groups, they should stay out of the cleanup.

For mould, Health Canada says professional help is warranted where sewage-contaminated floodwater was involved, regardless of patch size. Ottawa Public Health says homeowners may clean small mould patches of three square metres or less. Mould removal beyond small areas is covered at ottawaabatement.com.

On the financial side, the City of Ottawa's Compassionate Grant offers a $1,000 payment to homeowners affected by basement flooding due to sewer surcharging. It does not apply to damage caused by a sewer lateral blockage or overland flooding through a foundation crack or window well. The City asks for two or more items as proof of damage or costs over $1,000, where multiple photos count as one item. You also need to have reported the flooding to the City.

Sewer-backup coverage is an optional add-on, not standard. Canada.ca notes that "coverage for flooding is not typically included in a standard policy." Check your policy wording and contact your insurer first, before discarding anything, and keep all receipts.

Published estimates seen October 2026 put sewage cleanup alone, before any rebuilding, at about $3,000 to $15,000 or more; your quote will differ.

Before you sign with a contractor, ask them in writing exactly which materials they consider affected by the sewage, what they plan to remove, and how they will confirm the area is clear before any rebuilding begins.

Q4

Who cleans up after a sewer backup in Hintonburg, me or a contractor?

Ottawa Public Health says homeowners may clean small mould patches of 3 square metres or less, but sewage changes the picture: Health Canada says you must take special precautions if your house is flooded with sewage.

Ottawa Public Health says to treat all surfaces that have been in contact with floodwater as contaminated. Health Canada adds that children, pregnant women, and people with respiratory problems should never handle water and materials contaminated by sewage. If anyone in your household falls into those groups, that settles the question for your home. For everyone else, protective gear, including gloves, eye protection, a mask, and rubber boots, is recommended when handling sewage-contaminated materials.

What the cleanup involves matters here too. Ottawa Public Health says to remove and discard porous, wet building materials such as drywall, insulation, and ceiling tiles that have been exposed to floodwater. Health Canada says flooring soaked by floodwater should be removed and discarded. If the contaminated area includes wall cavities, ceiling or floor cavities, or a mould patch larger than three square metres, Health Canada says to bring in a professional. For anything beyond a small patch, ottawaabatement.com covers mould removal.

On cost, published estimates seen October 2026 put sewage cleanup alone, before any rebuilding, at about $3,000 to $15,000 or more. Your actual quote will differ.

A few things to sort out before work starts:

- Whether your home insurance policy includes sewer-backup coverage, which is an optional add-on, not a standard inclusion per Canada.ca
- Whether the City of Ottawa's Compassionate Grant applies to your situation: it offers a $1,000 payment for basement flooding caused by sewer surcharging, but not for a sewer lateral blockage or appliance failure, and you apply within one year of the flooding event
- Whether a contractor you hire carries WSIB coverage; ask for a clearance certificate

If a contractor does the work in your home, the Consumer Protection Act, 2002 requires that a direct agreement over $50 be in writing, and you have 10 days after receiving that written copy to cancel.
Document everything with photos before cleanup begins, keep all receipts, and call your insurer first to ask how the claim process works under your specific policy.

Q5

Is the floor safe to walk on after sewage came up in my Orleans basement?

Sewage in a basement is not safe to walk into without protection, and the floor surface itself should be treated as contaminated until it has been properly cleaned by someone equipped to do the work.

Ottawa Public Health states that you should "always consider floodwater and surfaces that have been in contact with floodwater to be contaminated." Health Canada adds that flooring soaked by flood water should be removed and discarded, and that anyone handling sewage-contaminated materials should wear gloves, eye protection, a mask and rubber boots. Health Canada also notes that children, pregnant women and people with respiratory problems should never handle water and materials contaminated by sewage.

There is a second concern before you step into the space at all. If the water reached your electrical outlets, baseboard heaters, furnace or electrical panel, the Electrical Safety Authority says not to enter until the local electric utility has disconnected the power. A licensed electrical contractor needs to check the system before power is restored, and that contractor files a notification with ESA. Ask for a copy of the ESA Certificate of Acceptance for your records and for your insurer.

Once the power question is settled, the floor is still not simply a surface you can walk across and then mop. Health Canada says flooring soaked by flood water should be removed and discarded, and Ottawa Public Health lists porous, wet building materials among the wet, porous building materials to remove. What sits underneath the finished floor, whether it is concrete, subfloor or something else, will also need assessment. A contractor doing sewage cleanup can tell you what needs to come out and what can be cleaned in place.

For the cleanup cost, published estimates seen October 2026 put sewage cleanup alone, before any rebuilding, at about $3,000 to $15,000 or more. Your quote will differ.

Before any contractor starts work, get the full scope, the price and the start and completion dates in writing, so there is no dispute later about what was agreed.

Q6

Can anything be saved after a sewer backup in a Westboro basement?

Sewer backup leaves behind contaminated water, and Ottawa Public Health says to treat every surface that came into contact with floodwater as contaminated. That shapes what can stay and what has to go.

What the guidance says about materials

Health Canada says to dispose of all insulation materials, drywall and carpets that have been exposed to flood water and cannot be dried, and Ottawa Public Health adds ceiling tiles to the porous materials to remove and discard. For a sewer backup, the contamination question applies to everything the water touched. Flooring soaked by floodwater should be removed and discarded.

Health Canada's discard list also covers particleboard furniture, mattresses, box springs, stuffed toys, pillows, cushions and furniture coverings exposed to flood water that cannot be dried. Ottawa Public Health says to dispose of household items exposed to floodwater that cannot be cleaned and dried within 48 hours. Ask your adjuster before anything is thrown out: the City says to notify your insurance adjuster if materials are discarded for health and safety reasons.

For protection, wear gloves, eye protection, a mask and rubber boots. Health Canada says children, pregnant women and people with respiratory problems should never handle water and materials contaminated by sewage.

If any mould has developed, Ottawa Public Health says homeowners may clean small patches of three square metres or less themselves. Health Canada recommends a professional for a single patch larger than three square metres or where the flood water was contaminated with sewage; ottawaabatement.com covers that work.

A few things to have in writing before decisions are made:

- Ask your insurer whether sewer-backup coverage applies and what documentation, including photos taken before any cleanup, is required.
- Ask the contractor which specific materials they recommend discarding versus cleaning, and why.
- Keep receipts for everything removed or replaced; your insurer may ask for them.

The City of Ottawa's Compassionate Grant offers a $1,000 payment to homeowners affected by basement flooding due to sewer surcharging. It is not available for overland flooding through a foundation crack or window well, and the City asks for two or more items as proof of damage or costs over $1,000, where multiple photos count as one item. Applications must be submitted within one year of the flooding event.
Start by getting a contractor into the space to assess what the water reached and for how long, so you have a clear list before anything is moved or discarded.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by Ottawa Flood Restoration. It does not constitute professional advice. Always consult qualified contractors and your local building authority (the City of Ottawa) before repairs start. Removing drywall so insulation can dry needs no building permit; replacing insulation with a different type or replacing framing does. Information is current as of November 22, 2026 and may change. Visit **ottawafloodrestoration.ca** for the latest answers.