

Blocked Toilet Plumbing Emergencies

The following information from the Chartered Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineering (CIPHE) can be used in printed, digital, and social communications to help consumers deal with common plumbing and heating issues. Emphasis should always be to employ a professional, appropriately registered professional to rectify plumbing problems.

The below information is free to use but please credit the Chartered Institute of Plumbing and Heating Engineering (CIPHE).

Blocked toilets

Cause of blocked toilets:

You should only ever flush the three P's - pee, poo and (toilet) paper - down your lavatory. This is what plumbing and sewerage systems were designed for. The pipes are relatively small and easily blocked and there really isn't much room for anything else to pass through.

This means that everything else should go in the bin, and especially includes:

- Any type of disposable wipe – baby wipes, make-up wipes, antibacterial cleaning wipes etc., even if it says it is flushable.
- Paper kitchen roll, paper hand towels or any other type of paper product that is not toilet roll.
- Any type of cotton wool product, including cotton wool pads and cotton ear buds.
- Sanitary items such as sanitary towels and tampons, including any of the packaging they are supplied with. This also includes incontinence pads and liners.
- Nappies.
- Contact lenses.

Prevention is better than cure as unblocking toilets or waste pipes is not a nice thing to have to do.

Potential issues:

Blocked toilets are deeply unpleasant and a potential health hazard. If your toilet is blocked, you may have the following issues:

- Water rising towards the brim of your toilet.
- Water taking a long time to drain out of the toilet bowl.

Away from the home, over half of sewer flooding is caused by blockages in sewers and drains, directly leading to pollution and exposure to bacteria that can cause serious life-limiting health conditions.

Note on DIY:

Normally if you had a blocked toilet, the CIPHE would advise calling in the services of your plumbing engineer straight away. This is still the case in most situations, as removing a blockage can be a deeply unpleasant job and is not always suitable for DIY.

However, the coronavirus pandemic has affected the availability of plumbers, and for those who are self-isolating or shielding, there may be some nervousness in letting an engineer into your home. The CIPHE has therefore published this advice, with the aim of enabling consumers to tackle small plumbing problems by themselves. If at any point you do not feel comfortable undertaking these tasks, please call in a professional plumbing engineer.

Solution (standard toilets):

Before

- Unblocking a toilet is not going to be nice. You must wear long sleeved rubber gloves and safety glasses.
- Make sure you wear old clothes, or clothes that you wear around the house when doing household jobs - they will potentially be contaminated afterwards and will require washing separately.
- Make sure the area has been protected with old newspapers / dust sheet etc. and that you have removed as much as possible from the toilet area. Splashing might occur and therefore removing items nearby will help.

During

- The starting point is the toilet bowl as this is probably where you would see a blockage. If it's full of waste (and this would obviously be messy contaminated waste), you need to take precautions if you are thinking of attempting to try unblocking it yourself.
- Have a bucket of hot water to hand, as this might help dissolve things.
- If you are going to put any chemicals down the toilet, beware they give off fumes and doors and windows need to be open.
- Drain un-blocker chemicals are very powerful and can be very dangerous if you breathe fumes in or get it on your eyes or skin. Always read the manufacturer's label to see what they recommend for correct and safe use. If in doubt, don't use it.
- To remove the blockage manually, start with a plunge/force cup if you have one. Otherwise, you might use a traditional mop, but it is very important this is not used thereafter. By plunging the force cup (or mop) down into the outlet, you start a momentum of pressure - as it is pulled backwards the contents ought to be sucked out by the pressure created.
- Once clear, flush the WC several times.

After

- Thoroughly clean down all areas around and within, including the underside of the seat to ensure there is no contamination.

If you need to seek the help of a professional, you can find a plumbing and drainage professional:

- Online at www.ciphe.org.uk
- By phoning 01708 472791
- By emailing info@ciphe.org.uk

Blocked Toilet Tips

- Don't wait for a slow draining toilet to get worse. Act as soon as you suspect there may be an issue.
- If you call out a plumber/drainage person, make sure you get an idea of charges before they arrive. Don't panic and make ill-thought decisions.
- However, a blockage can be involved or very simple and until you start you don't know how long you might be or if you require equipment. As drainage is mostly out of sight it is difficult to diagnose just looking at it. Therefore, you should check charges beforehand as sadly there's always unscrupulous people.

Mechanical WC

If you have a mechanical WC (macerator) then the guidance has not changed. Macerators **only** take toilet paper, anything else will block the motor and cause it to cease. This will lead to failure and potentially great expense.

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.

If your mechanical WC is blocked, call in the services of your professional plumber ASAP. You should not try to clear the blockage yourself.

External blockages

The CIPHE does not recommend DIY tasks on drainage systems, especially outside. This is because when you lift manhole covers, they can be heavy, deep or when exposed they make the area unsafe, unless you know what you are doing.

In the case of external blockages, you must get an agreed cost from a professional engineer. This might be per hour, call out charges or for specialist equipment. Don't go forward with open ended cost.

If you need to call in professional help, make sure you engage the services of a member of the CIPHE. They have been vetted for qualifications and experience by the Industry's Chartered Professional body and abide by a Code of Professional Standards. You can find one:

- online at www.ciphe.org.uk
- by phoning 01708 472791
- by emailing info@ciphe.org.uk

Quotes

Kevin Wellman, CEO, CIPHE

"When it comes to what you can flush, we commonly talk about the three P's - pee, poo and (toilet) paper. These are the only things that should be flushed down the toilet. This is what plumbing and sewerage systems were designed for. The pipes are relatively small and easily blocked and there really isn't much room for anything else to pass through."

Kevin Wellman in relation to **COVID-19**

“The Coronavirus pandemic means we are in an unprecedented situation. If your plumbing system does become blocked and you need to call out a professional plumber, it is vital you are honest about your situation. This will both protect your engineer and any vulnerable customers they may also be visiting. If you are self-isolating, displaying symptoms of COVID-19, your local plumbing and drainage professional may not be able to help you. For your own safety and wellbeing, prevention is therefore much better than cure.”

Jerry Whiteley, Technical Manager, CIPHE

“Prevention is better than cure in the first instance as unblocking toilets or waste pipes is not a nice thing to have to do. I have never met anyone who likes it. Don’t flush anything other than biodegradable products, which will simply dissolve. Kitchen roll, tissues or wipes just compound into a solid mass and shouldn’t be used.”

“Blocked toilets are deeply unpleasant and a potential health hazard. If you do get caught short and use something other than toilet roll, always bin it, never flush it. If you do run out of supplies, then washing with water after toileting (much in the style of the bidet) is an alternative to wiping.”

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