

# Emergency Response



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*Your Health Connection*

## FOOD SAFETY & DISPOSAL AFTER A FLOOD or POWER OUTAGE

During a power outage or flood it is important to consider the safety of your food and water. This will help protect yourself and family against food or waterborne illnesses. Flood water may carry silt, raw sewage, oil or chemical waste. Food and water may become contaminated if it comes in contact with contaminated flood water. If your water source is a private well, it may also become contaminated with floodwaters making it unsafe to drink, cook and prepare foods with. A power outage can also result in certain foods becoming potentially hazardous for consumption because foods cannot be maintained at 4 C (40 F) or less. As a rule of thumb, an unopened refrigerator will keep foods cool for 4 - 6 hours without power. Where a refrigerator has been opened and closed, the temperature cannot be maintained. It is recommended that any hazardous foods (meat, fish, dairy, eggs or prepared foods) be disposed. If you are unsure if a food is safe for consuming, remember, when in doubt, throw it out.

### Dry or Pre-Packaged Foods:

It is recommended that the following food items that have come in contact with flood waters be discarded:

- Foods wrapped/stored in paper, plastic cloth, fiber or cardboard. Examples include: dry foods such as flour, sugar, candy, cereal, baked goods, dried beans and rice.
- All foods with permeable containers such screw-caps, snap-lids, pull tops and crimped-cap containers. These containers may not be waterproof.
- Commercially-canned foods that are damaged. Cans that are bulging, swelling, leaking, punctured, dented or have holes, fractures or are rusting should be thrown out.
- Home-canned food in glass containers. Throw away the food and flat part of the lids. Empty glass jars can be washed and sterilized for future use.
- Fruits and vegetables.

### Refrigerated Foods

All hazardous foods (meat, poultry, dairy, fish and eggs) that has been stored above 4 C (40 F) for more than 2 hours must be discarded due to the increased risk of the growth of organisms that can cause foodborne illness. It is recommended that you discard:

- Raw or cooked meat products such as cold cuts, poultry and poultry products
- Fish and seafood
- Milk and milk products, including yogurt and cheese
- Casseroles, stews, soups
- Salads such as pasta, potato, and rice
- Raw and cooked vegetables

See over...

### **Frozen Foods:**

If your chest freezer is full, foods inside should remain safely frozen for up to 48 hours after a power outage. If your freezer is half full, foods inside should remain safely frozen for 24 hours after a power outage. Any foods that are thawed should be thrown out. For example:

- Discard thawed vegetables, fish, shellfish, ice cream and frozen foods because bacteria multiply rapidly in these foods.
- Partially thawed foods that still contain ice crystals can be safely refrozen. However partial thawing and refreezing reduces the quality of most foods.
- Fruits that still look and smell good may be refrozen.

### **Food Storage and Kitchen Clean Up:**

After a flood, items you use to prepare or serve food in, may have become contaminated (e.g. porous items that may come in contact with food or with person's mouth: baby bottle nipples and pacifiers; wooden bowls; and plastic, paper or foam food storage containers and utensils).

It is recommended that prior to use you:

- Wash and disinfect the outside of commercially sealed, unopened, undamaged, airtight canned goods.
- Wash and disinfect utensils/silverware, cookware, dishware, food contact surfaces, food preparation equipment and floors.

Appliances and surfaces that have been in contact with flood water can carry bacteria to your food if you don't sanitize them. Wash appliances, utensils, dishes, cutting boards (wood or plastic) and surfaces first with a strong detergent then sanitize with an effective bleach solution of ½ tsp. (2ml) of household bleach in 4 cups (1L) of clean warm water. Be sure that there is a minimum contact time of 45 seconds. Due to the potential for contamination from spoiled foods onto storage racks/shelves, all refrigerators and freezers in your home must be disinfected by use of an effective sanitizer. Prior to restocking refrigerators and freezer units please be sure that they are operating at appropriate temperatures.

**To speak with a public health inspector, call 721-7520 (1-877 721-7520) or visit our website [www.smdhu.org](http://www.smdhu.org)**