

Countywide Services Agency

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Food Safety During a Disaster

Critical Points

- Throw away food that may have come in contact with flood or storm water.
- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible and add block ice or dry ice if the electricity is expected to be off longer than 4 hours.
- Local authorities will tell you if tap water is safe to drink or use for cooking or bathing. If the water is unsafe, follow the directions of local authorities to safely disinfect the water.
- For babies using formula from powder, use bottled water, boiled water, or water that has been treated.

Food Safety

Food may not be safe to eat during and after a disaster. Safe water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene includes bottled, boiled, or treated water. Contact this department for specific recommendations for boiling or treating water in your area.

Handwashing

After a disaster, finding running water can be difficult. However, keeping your hands clean helps you avoid getting sick.

- ✓ Wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds.
- ✓ When water is not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- ✓ Wash hands before preparing or eating food and after going to the bathroom.

Identify and throw away food that may not be safe to eat.

- ✗ **Throw away** food that may have come in contact with flood or storm water.
- ✗ **Throw away** food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture.
- ✗ **Throw away** perishable foods (including meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftovers) that have been above 40°F Fahrenheit (F) for 4 hours or more.
- ✗ **Throw away** canned foods that are bulging, opened, or damaged.
- ✗ **Throw away** food in containers with screw-caps, snap-lids, crimped caps (soda pop bottles), twist caps, flip tops, snap-open, and home canned foods if they have come into contact with floodwater. These containers cannot be safely disinfected without contaminating the food inside.
- ✗ Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash/prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula.
- ✓ Thawed food that contains ice crystals or is 40°F or below can be refrozen or cooked.

Store food safely

While the power is out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. The refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door remains closed.

Clean and sanitize food-contact surfaces

The CDC recommends discarding the following items if they have come in contact with flood waters; wooden cutting boards, baby bottle nipples, and pacifiers. These items cannot be properly sanitized if they have come into contact with contaminated flood waters.

Clean and sanitize food-contact surfaces in a four-step process:

1. Wash with soap and warm, clean water.
2. Rinse with clean water.
3. Sanitize by immersing for 1 minute in a solution of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach (5.25%, unscented) per gallon of water.
4. Allow to air dry.

Related Resources

- USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline: 1-888-MPHotline.
Available for consumers' questions and concerns about food safety
www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/usda_meat_&_poultry_hotline/index.asp
- Hand Hygiene After a Disaster
When to wash your hands & how to do it without running water
www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/handhygiene.asp
- Keeping Food Safe in an Emergency. U.S. Department of Agriculture
General fact sheet and FAQs on food and water safety including guidance on when to discard perishable foods
www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/keeping_food_Safe_during_an_emergency/index.asp
- Consumer Advice: Disaster Assistance with Food
Provides resources on food safety related to fires, floods, hurricanes, & power outages
www.foodsafety.gov
- Food Safety Office, CDC
Comprehensive food safety information
www.cdc.gov/foodsafety
- Cleaning and Sanitizing with Bleach After an Emergency
www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/pdf/bleach
- Being Prepared, American Red Cross
Comprehensive site on preparing for emergencies including power outages – see section Preparing and Getting Trained
www.redcross.org