



FOOD SAFETY IN EMERGENCY CONDITIONS

In an emergency situation, food should be prepared and eaten in the cleanest conditions possible to prevent the spread of disease. In addition, make sure food is safe and will not cause food poisoning.

Food Should be Clean

- Wash your hands before preparing food. Wash your hands before eating. Do not eat with your hands.
- Carefully clean food preparation areas and utensils. Wash them with soap and SAFE water. Rinse in/with a sanitizing solution of 1 tablespoon unscented chlorine bleach in 1 gallon of warm (not hot) water. Air dry.

Food Should be Safe

Fresh Food

- Wash raw fruits and vegetables with safe water before eating.
- Do not eat food with mold on it. Visible mold is the “bloom.” Invisible fibers can be throughout the food. Mold may contain harmful toxins or cause allergic reactions.

Shelf Stable Food:

These foods are canned or otherwise packaged and do not need refrigeration until they are opened. Remember:

- Canned foods should be eaten within an hour after opening. Uneaten food should be thrown away.
- Make sure the can looks to be in good condition before serving the contents. It should have no bulging of the lid, dents, broken seals or leaking. Watch carefully as you open the can with a can opener. If the food squirts out, throw the can away. If the contents are cloudy, have a bad odor or show mold, do not eat the food in the can. If a can passes these tests, it will be safe to eat even if the current date is a year past the expiration date. However, **DO NOT EAT TOMATO PRODUCTS FROM A CAN IF THE DATE HAS PASSED.**
- Crackers, cake mixes and other items containing oil may go rancid causing an off taste. While they will not cause immediate illness, they can have long term effects and should only be eaten for a short time to prevent starvation.

Refrigerated and Frozen Foods

During an electrical outage, refrigerated or frozen food needs special handling. Making some preparations beforehand will help preserve these foods safely.

Before the outage:

- Have one or more ice chests on hand. (Styrofoam coolers will work.)
- Put appliance thermometers in both the refrigerator and freezer. These will help determine food safety when the refrigerator and freezer are later opened.
- Store bags of ice or frozen jugs of water in freezer. This helps freezer stay cold while power is out and cools ice chests if the outage is long term. (Leave a one-inch space in top of jugs as water expands when it freezes.)

- Group food together in the freezer. This helps food stay cold longer. Fill empty areas with ice or frozen water containers so freezer stays cold longer.

During the outage:

- Do not open your refrigerator or freezer. An unopened refrigerator will keep foods cold enough for four hours. An unopened freezer will keep food safe for 24 hours if it's half full and 48 hours if it's full.
- If the power outage continues for more than 4 hours, pack such items as dairy products, meats, eggs and leftovers in your cooler packed with ice. (In some cases this will require opening your freezer to get the ice which will significantly shorten how long the freezer will stay cold. A better course may be to eat what is in your refrigerator and leave the freezer closed.)
- If the power outage continues beyond 24-48 hours (depending on how full freezer is), prepare another cooler with ice and transfer your freezer items to the cooler.

After the outage:

- **You can't rely on the appearance or order of food to determine it's safety. Never taste food to determine its safety!**
- If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, check the temperature when the power comes back on. If the freezer thermometer reads 40 degrees or less, the food is safe and can be refrozen or cooked and eaten.
- If the food contains ice crystals, it is safe to refreeze or cook.
- If you plan to eat refrigerated or frozen meat, poultry, fish or eggs **if it is still at safe temperatures**, it's important to cook the food to the proper temperature to destroy food-borne bacteria. **Don't short cut cooking to save fuel.**
- Keep in mind that **perishable food** such as meat, poultry, seafood, milk, and eggs which are **not kept adequately refrigerated or frozen may cause illness if consumed, even when they are thoroughly cooked.**

Special Note: Food Exposed to Flood Water

Food that has been in contact with flood water is almost always contaminated and should be thrown out. Discard any food that has screw on caps, snap lids, pull tops, and crimped caps (soda bottles) as these are not water proof. Also discard cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes and home canned foods if they have come into contact with flood water.

Commercially canned food may be safe. If the cans are not bulging, dented or rusted do the following:

- Remove the labels.
- Wash the cans to remove any sign of dirt.
- Soak the washed cans in a solution of 1 cup bleach to 5 gallons of water for 15 minutes.
- Remove the cans from the solution and let them air dry for at least one hour.
- Re-label the cans with a marker. Include the expiration date.

Plastic utensils, wooden cutting boards, baby bottles and nipples and baby pacifiers that have been exposed to flood water contamination should be thrown out. They cannot be adequately sanitized for future use.