

Keeping Food Safe During An Emergency

Severe storms often result in extended power losses and flooding. To protect your health and keep your food supply safe, consider taking the following precautions:

Steps to follow to prepare for a possible weather emergency/power outage/flooding:

- Keep an appliance thermometer in both the refrigerator and freezer to help determine the safety of the food. Buy them NOW!
- Make sure the freezer is at/below 0° F and the refrigerator is at/below 40° F. Before an emergency, set the controls colder than normal.
- Freeze containers of water for ice to help keep food cold in the freezer, refrigerator, or coolers during an outage.
- Freeze refrigerated items like leftovers, milk, fresh meat and poultry to keep them at a safe temperature longer.
- Shelve pantry food out of the way of flood waters.
- Store at least 1 gallon of drinking water per person per day (don't forget pets). Store a 3 day minimum supply.
- Have coolers on hand to keep refrigerator food cold if the power is out for more than four hours. Store ice cubes for use in the refrigerator or coolers. Freeze gel packs for coolers.
- Group food together in the freezer to help it stay cold longer. For frozen meat & poultry, group on separate trays. If meats thaw, juices will not contaminate other foods.

Steps to follow after the weather emergency/power outage/flooding:

- Never taste a food to determine its safety!
- Keep refrigerator/freezer doors closed to maintain cold temperatures.
- Food in an unopened refrigerator should be safe about 4 hours. An unopened full freezer should hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours - half full).
- Food may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is at 40° F or below.
- If there is no freezer thermometer, check each package. If the food contains ice crystals, the food is safe.
- Discard any items that have contacted raw meat juices.
- Following an evacuation, if you suspect that the food has been thawed and refrozen over time, the safest plan is to discard the food.
- Discard perishable food like meat, poultry, fish, soft cheeses, milk, eggs, leftovers, and deli items if the refrigerator temperature has risen above 40 F for 2 hours or more. Remember you can't rely on appearance or odor.
- Drink only bottled water if flooding has occurred.
- Discard any food that may have come in contact with flood water.
- Discard cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers. There is no way to safely clean them.
- Thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes, glasses, and utensils with soap and hot water. Sanitize them by boiling (rolling boil for 1 minute) or immersing them for 15 minutes in 3 tablespoons of chlorine bleach per gallon of water. Air dry.
- Dispose of any questionable items. Remember: ***When in Doubt, Throw it Out!***

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