

Consumer Food Safety for Emergencies

Natural disasters, including floods, fire or severe storms, can jeopardize the safety of your food. Knowing how to minimize potential loss of food and reduce the risk of food borne illness will help you keep your family safe during an emergency.

Power Outages

Prepare

- Keep appliance thermometers in your refrigerator and freezer, ensuring the refrigerator is set at 40°F or below and the freezer is set at 0°F or below.
- Freeze containers of water for ice to help keep food cold in the freezer, refrigerator or coolers after the power is out.
- Freeze refrigerated items you may not need immediately.
- Store food on shelves that will be safely out of the way of contaminated water in case of flooding.

Respond

- Never taste food to determine its safety.
- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed to maintain the cold temperature.
- A refrigerator will keep food safely cool for about 4 hours. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if half full).
- Food may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is at 40°F or below.
- Obtain block ice or dry ice to keep your refrigerator and freezer as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for a prolonged period of time. Fifty pounds of dry ice should hold an 18-cubic-foot full freezer for 2 days.
- Discard refrigerated perishable food such as meat, poultry, fish, soft cheeses, milk, eggs, leftovers and deli items after 4 hours without power.

Floods

During flooding:

- Drink only bottled water if flooding has occurred.
- Thoroughly wash all metal pans, ceramic dishes and utensils that come in contact with flood water with hot soapy water and sanitize by boiling these items in clean water, or by immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of one teaspoon of chlorine bleach per quart of water.

After flooding, discard:

- Home-canned foods that came in contact with flood waters.
- All foods in cardboard boxes, paper, foil, cellophane or cloth.
- Meat, poultry, eggs or fish.
- Spices, seasonings, extracts, flour, sugar, grain, coffee, and other staples in canisters.
- Fruits and vegetables that have not been harvested from gardens and have been submerged in flood waters.

- Unopened jars with waxed cardboard seals, such as mayonnaise and salad dressing. Also, throw away preserves sealed with paraffin.
- Wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers.

After flooding, save:

- Canned foods that did not come into contact with flood water.
- Commercially canned foods that came into contact with flood water and have been properly cleaned by: labeling cans with the name of food in permanent marker; removing labels; washing cans in water containing detergent; soaking cans for at least one minute in chlorine solution; rinsing in clean, cool water; placing on sides to dry (do not stack cans).
- Dishes and glassware if they are sanitized by boiling in clean water or by immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of one teaspoon of chlorine bleach per quart of water.
- Thoroughly wash countertops with soap and hot water. Rinse and sanitize by applying a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water. Allow to air-dry.
- When in doubt, throw it out.

Boil Water Advisories

- Boiling water for one minute will kill most types of disease-causing organisms that may be present in the water. After being boiled, water should be cooled, then stored in clean containers with covers.
- Wells that have been flooded should be tested and disinfected after flood waters recede.

Questions about food safety may be directed to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Bureau of Food Safety and Laboratory Services at 717-787-4315. More information is also available online at www.EatSafePA.com.