

Food Safety After a Flood



During power outages

- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature.
- 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) and the door remains closed.
- Discard refrigerated food such as meat, poultry, fish, soft cheeses, milk, eggs, leftovers and deli items if the food temperature is above 41°F for more than 4 hours.
- Food may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is at 41°F or below when checked with a food thermometer.
- Never taste a food to determine if it is safe!
- Obtain dry or block ice to keep your refrigerator and freezer as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for a long period of time. Fifty pounds of dry ice should hold an 18-cubic-foot full freezer for 2 days.
- If the power has been out for several days, check the temperature of the freezer with an appliance thermometer. If the appliance thermometer reads 41°F or below, the food is safe to refreeze.
- If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine its safety. If the food still contains ice crystals, the food is safe.

Steps to follow after the flood

- Throw away any food if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water. Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers.
- Thoroughly wash all metal pans, dishes and utensils that came in contact with flood water with hot soapy water. Disinfect cleaned equipment with a solution of 1 tablespoon of regular, household bleach per gallon of clean water.
- If you are on a public drinking water system, check to see if a boil order or advisory has been issued before using tap water for drinking or cleaning. Consider utilizing bottled water that has not been exposed to flood waters in the interim.
- If you are on a private drinking water system, contact your local public health agency to discuss options for having your system tested before using tap water for drinking or cleaning. Consider utilizing bottled water that has not been exposed to flood waters in the interim.