



Food Safety in an Emergency

In the event of an emergency we may be faced with certain food safety issues. Power outages, flooding, and fire are all examples of disasters that can make food and water unsafe for us to consume and can cause food borne illnesses.

Food Safety in a Power Outage:

A power outage may be caused from many different events ranging from earthquake to general electrical problems. In any event, we should know the following food safety guidelines:

Refrigerated Foods

In general food that is in our refrigerators will remain safe for up to 4 hours. It is important that we limit opening the refrigerator door in order for it to stay as cool as possible for as long as possible. Food in our refrigerators should remain at 40°F or cooler. We can use an appliance thermometer to easily determine the temperature of our refrigerators.

Food that can be stored at room temperature for a couple of days:

- Butter/margarine
- Hard cheeses
- Fruits/veggies
- Dried fruits
- Peanut butter/jelly
- Mustard/ketchup
- Fruit pies/cakes

Foods that we should throw away if the refrigerator temperature rises above 40°F for more than a couple of hours:

- Meat (raw/cooked)
- Poultry and seafood
- Lunchmeats
- Dairy (milk, yogurt, cream cheese)
- Mayonnaise
- Creamy dressings
- Pasta/potato salads
- Eggs
- Gravies
- Cookie dough's/batters

Frozen Foods

Foods stored in our freezers will stay frozen for 1-2 days, dependant upon how full the freezer is. We should limit opening the freezer door in order to keep foods as cold as possible for as long as possible. In general the foods in our freezers will stay safe and can be refrozen as long as the freezer stays at or below 40°F. If we do not have an appliance thermometer in the freezer we can inspect each piece of food individually. If there are still ice crystals on the food then it is safe to refreeze (the quality of the food may decrease however, the safety of the food is still good). We should throw out foods that do not have any ice crystals left on them. We should also throw out any foods (refrigerator or freezer) that may have come in contact with raw meet juices.

One way that we can keep the freezer cooler for longer is to add dry ice or blocks of regular ice to it. Make sure to protect the food with a cardboard barrier if using dry ice.

Food Safety in a Flood:

Because floodwater may carry oil, sewage, and chemical waste, it will often contain different types of bacteria and harmful substances that can contaminate our foods. Because of this it is important that if our homes become flooded we throw out any foods that may have come in contact with the floodwater.

The only foods that are safe to keep after coming in contact with floodwater are commercially canned foods (metal cans) that do not have dents, and are not leaking, or bulging.

Salvaging our commercially canned foods (undamaged cans only):

- 1) With a permanent marker, write the contents and expiration date on the can.
- 2) Remove the paper label.
- 3) Using hot water, wash the cans with soap and a scrub brush.
- 4) Rinse can with clean water.
- 5) Sanitize the cans with one of the following procedures:
 - a) Place cans in a pot of water. Bring water to a boil and continue boiling for 2 minutes. Or,
 - b) Soak cans in a solution of 1 Tbsp. bleach per 1 gallon of water. Allow to soak for 15 minutes. We should use regular household bleach and avoid using scented and color-safe bleaches.
- 6) Air dry for a minimum of 1 hour before opening cans.

*We can sanitize our utensils and dishes in this manner as well.

Food Safety in a Fire:

We should not eat any foods that have been in or near a fire. This is because of several factors affecting the safety of our foods including heat, smoke, and chemicals. The heat from a fire can cause harmful bacteria to grow on all types of foods, including canned foods. The smoke and toxic fumes released from the fire are harmful to our foods, including food that is in the refrigerator and freezer. And the chemicals that are used to put out fires cannot be washed off of our foods. Therefore, it is best that we **throw out all food products that have been in or near a fire.**

Water Safety in an Emergency:

It is always best that we store bottled water (out of reach of floodwaters) for use in an emergency. However, if we find ourselves in a situation where our regular supply of water has been deemed unsafe for drinking or our bottled water has been exposed to floodwaters, then we will need to perform a water purification treatment before drinking, cooking, and brushing our teeth with it.

Treating Water for Safe Use:

Filtering – We should always filter cloudy water before treating it. We can use coffee filters, towels, cheesecloth, etc in order to filter the water.

Boiling – Boiling is one way to treat water that is unsafe. It is the preferred method of treating if a heat source is available because it will kill the most amounts of bacteria. All we need to do is bring the water to a boil (in a clean container) and continue boiling for at least 3 minutes. Cover the water and let it cool down before using it.

Bleaching – If boiling is not an option for treating our water, then we can use regular household bleach in order to make water safe. All we need to do is add 1/8 tsp bleach per gallon of water, stir well, and let it sit for 30 minutes before use. We should not use scented or color-safe bleaches for this treatment.