



Food Safety Guidelines During a Flood

During and after a flood, affected residents need to take precautions to protect their personal health and safety. The Lake County Health Department/Community Health Center recommends the following guidelines regarding food safety.

In general, you should not eat any food that has come in contact with floodwater. Additionally, you should always wash your hands with soap and clean, warm water for at least 20 seconds before handling any food. If the safety of any food or beverage is questionable, follow this simple rule: ***When in doubt, throw it out.***

Some food in cans, bottles or other sealed packages, however, may be safe to use after a good cleaning. Carefully examine all canned and bottled goods that have been submerged or come in contact with floodwater. Follow these guidelines:

- After being under water, containers with cork-lined lids or caps, screw tops or pop-tops are nearly impossible to clean thoroughly around the opening. Any major temperature changes can actually cause contaminants to be sucked into such containers. They should be discarded.
- If they appear undamaged, tin cans are usually safe. Wash in bleach water (1/4-cup bleach in 1 gallon of water) for one minute, then dry to prevent rusting.
- If cans have pitted rust spots that cannot be buffed off with a soft cloth, contamination may have entered through corroded holes in the walls of the can. Discard these cans.
- Cans with ends that bulge or spring in and out when pressed should be discarded immediately. This usually means bacteria are growing inside and producing gas that expands the can. **Do not taste the contents of such cans.**
- If a can is crushed, dented or creased, closely examine it to see if it is safe to use. A dent may weaken the seam and allow contamination. If a dent or crease is very sharp, the contents may be contaminated. Discard these cans. **Do not taste.**

What To Do When Your Freezer Fails

When the electricity is off, a fully stocked freezer will keep food frozen two days if the door remains closed. A half-full freezer can keep foods frozen about one day. What can you do if electric service will not be reconnected within one or two days?

- Keep the freezer door closed.
- If your friends have electricity, divide your frozen foods among their freezers.
- Seek freezer space in a store, church, school, or commercial meat locker or freezer that has electrical service.
- Know where you can buy dry and block ice. Dry ice freezes everything it touches; 25 pounds of it will keep a 10-cubic-foot freezer below freezing for three to four days. When using dry ice, though, be sure to take several precautions. **Never touch dry ice with bare hands!** Also, do not stick your head into a freezer that contains dry ice. It gives off carbon dioxide, which replaces oxygen, so leave the door open a short time before examining your food.
- If food is still "cold-to-the-touch," it may be cooked and eaten immediately, or refrozen.

What To Do When Your Refrigerator Fails

When power goes off in the refrigerator, you can normally expect food inside to stay safely cold for four to six hours, depending on how warm your kitchen is.

- Add block ice to the refrigerator if the electricity is off longer than four to six hours.
- High-protein foods (dairy products, meat, fish, poultry) should be consumed as soon as possible if power is not restored immediately. They cannot be stored safely at room temperature.
- Fruits and vegetables can be kept safely at room temperature until there are obvious signs of spoilage (mold, slime, wilt). In fact, with good ventilation, vegetables will last longer at room temperature. Remove them from the refrigerator if electrical service may not resume soon.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions if you have any doubts about the safety of any food, water or conditions around your home. Call Environmental Health Services of the Lake County Health Department at: (847) 377-8020.