

Food Safety During an Emergency

The safety of your food could easily be jeopardized in the event of a flood, fire, or loss of power. In order to reduce the risk of food borne illness, it is important to know how to determine if food is safe during an emergency. Know how to keep food safe will also minimize the amount of food lost during an emergency.

Keep Food Cold

During a power failure, keep the doors to the fridge and freezer closed as much as possible to maintain the temperature.

Maintain fridge temperature at 4oC (40oF) or colder, and freezer temperature at -18oC (0oF) at all times, using a thermometer to ensure proper temperature. The colder the food is to begin with, the longer it will maintain its temperature in the event of a power failure.

An unopened fridge will keep food cold for about 4 hours. Discard any perishable food that has been above 4oC (40oF) for more than 2 hours. An unopened freezer will hold temperature for about 48 hours (24 hours if half full). When power is restored, check each item in the freezer individually. If the food still contains ice crystals or is 4oC (40oF) or colder, it is safe to refreeze.

If possible, obtain blocks of ice to keep fridge cold if power will be off for a prolonged period of time.

Have coolers on hand with frozen gel packs to help keep food cold if power will be out for more than 4 hours.

In the event of a snowstorm, fill empty containers with water and leave them outdoors to freeze. Then put this ice into your fridge or freezer to keep it cold.

Be Prepared

A planned emergency food supply should include items that don't require refrigeration and can be eaten cold. Examples include: shelf-stable food, boxed or canned milk, bottled water, canned goods.

Ensure you have ready-to-use baby formula and put food on hand (and a can opener!).

Use the above items and replace them from time to time to ensure safe shelf life. It is a good idea to label all items with the date purchased.

Store the above mentioned food on shelves that will be high enough to avoid contamination from flood water.

General Rules

Discard all food that comes in contact with floodwater including canned goods.

Discard all food that has been near a fire, including pre-packaged foods and food in cans and jars. Food exposed to fire can be damaged by heat, smoke and chemicals used to fight the fire. A refrigerator seal is not airtight thus allowing fumes to contaminate the food stored inside.

Wash all utensils with hot, soapy water and sanitize by immersing them in a solution of 2 teaspoons of chlorine bleach per gallon of hot water.

Drink only approved or chlorinated water. Keep a supply of commercial bottle water at your home.

Last Revised/Reviewed

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