

# Safe Food Handling During a Disaster

Disasters can make food safety difficult. Here's how to keep you and your family safe and healthy when handling food if you are in a disaster area.



## Water

- Have bottled water stored for emergencies (one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation)
- Be prepared to boil tap water if necessary to kill germs. Filter it through clean cloth or coffee filters if water is cloudy, then boil
- If you can't boil water, you can disinfect it using household bleach. Add 1/8 teaspoon (or 8 drops) of regular, unscented, liquid household bleach for each gallon of water, stir it well and let it stand for 30 minutes before you use it
- Store disinfected water in clean containers with covers
- If you have a well that has been flooded, the water should be tested and disinfected after flood waters recede. If you suspect that your well may be contaminated, contact your local or state health department or agriculture extension agent for specific advice

## Food

- Have food items on hand that don't require refrigeration and can be eaten cold or heated on an outdoor grill
- Shelf-stable food, boxed or canned milk, water, and canned goods should be part of a planned emergency food supply. Power outages can render refrigerated food unusable and unsafe.
- Have ready-to-use baby formula for infants and pet food
- Use these items and replace them regularly
- Be sure to keep a hand-operated can opener for an emergency



## Clean

- Before handling food, thoroughly wash your hands with hot soapy water
- Rinse raw produce under running water. Use a vegetable brush to clean to remove dirt
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and countertops with hot, soapy water. Wipe up spills immediately

# Refrigeration

Keep meat, poultry, fish, and eggs refrigerated at or below 44 °F and frozen food at or below 0 °F. This may be difficult when the power is out.



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 if the door remains closed. Obtain dry or block ice to keep your refrigerator 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. Plan ahead and know where dry ice and block ice can be purchased.

# Storage

Consider what you can do ahead of time to store your food safely in an emergency. If you live in a location that could be affected by a flood, store food on shelves that will be safely out of the way of contaminated water. Coolers are a great help for keeping food cold if the power will be out for more than 4 hours—have a couple on hand along with frozen gel packs. When your freezer is not full, keep items close together—this helps the food stay cold longer.



# Cooking



Cooking food properly means heating it for a long enough time at a high enough temperature to kill harmful bacteria that may cause food borne illnesses. This temperature can vary from food to food.

- Use a clean food thermometer to determine whether meat and poultry are properly cooked (155° for ground beef, 165° for poultry)
- Fish must be cooked to 145°
- Eggs must be cooked until yolks and whites are firm. Avoid using recipes in which eggs remain raw, unless pasteurized eggs are used
- Leftovers should be reheated to 165°
- Bring sauces, soups, and gravies to 165°



For local information

## Web Resources

[http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact\\_Sheets/keeping\\_food\\_Safe\\_during\\_an\\_emergency/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/keeping_food_Safe_during_an_emergency/index.asp)

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/foodwater.asp>