



Cooperative Extension Service

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Basic Food Safety During Flooding

During flooding and other emergencies, cooking and eating habits change to fit the situation. Health risks from contaminated food or spoiled food increases, so it is important to take precautions to maintain the health of your family, friends and volunteers. Water supplies can become contaminated. Local announcements should provide updated information on the safety of the water supply.

Do not eat any food that may have come in contact with flood water. **If in doubt, throw it out.** Food packed in plastic, paper, cardboard, cloth or similar containers that have been water damaged will be contaminated and should not be eaten. Throw away any food and beverage containers with screw-caps, snap lids, crimped caps (soda bottles), twist caps, flip tops and home canned foods if they come in contact with flood waters because they cannot be disinfected.

Canned food in all-metal cans or retort pouches can be saved if you remove the labels, thoroughly wash the cans, rinse them and then disinfect them with a sanitizing solution consisting of 1 tablespoon of bleach per gallon of potable water. Remember to re-label the containers that had the labels removed, including the expiration date with a marker.

Be sure to wear gloves and protective clothing when cleaning or disinfecting to avoid skin contact, irritation or infection. Wooden cutting boards, wooden dishes and utensils, plastic utensil, baby bottle nipples, and pacifiers that have come into contact with food waters cannot be safely cleaned and should be discarded. Thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes, and utensils with soap and water, hot water if available. Don't forget the can opener. Rinse, and then sanitize them by boiling in clean water or immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water.

Wash countertops with soap and water, rinse and sanitize them and allow to air dry. Be sure to carefully clean corners, cracks and crevices, door handles and door seals, in rooms affected by flood water.

If there has been a loss of power, be sure to keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed to maintain the cold temperature. Refrigerators will keep food cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will keep the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door

remains closed. Buy dry or block ice to keep the refrigerator as cold as possible. Fifty pounds of dry ice should hold an 18 cubic foot fully-stocked freezer cold for two days.

When the power is back on, check the safety of your food. If the appliance has a thermometer, check it when the power comes back on. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, or leftovers) that has been above 40 ° F for two hours or more. If food in the freezer still has ice crystals or is 40 F or below, it is safe to refreeze or cook.

Source: Patti Griffith, University of Wyoming Extension Educator for Nutrition and Food Safety



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