

# **FDA Offers Food Safety Information for Expected Power Outages and Flooding Due to Hurricanes**

- In the event power outages or floods occur from hurricanes, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration says the most significant food safety challenge consumers will face will be keeping refrigerated foods at or below 40 degrees F and frozen food at or below 0 F.
- Perishable food such as meat, poultry, seafood, milk and eggs that are not properly refrigerated or frozen may cause illness if consumed, even if it is thoroughly cooked.
- FDA says that if flooding is an issue, consumers will also need to evaluate the safety of their stored food and the safety of their water supply.
- Here's what consumers can do at home to keep their food safe:

## **Food safety when the power goes out**

- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. The refrigerator 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 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.
- If you will be eating your refrigerated or frozen meat, poultry, fish or eggs while they are still at safe temperatures, be sure they are thoroughly cooked to the proper temperature to assure that any foodborne bacteria that may be present is destroyed.
- Wash fruits and vegetables with water from a safe source before eating.
- For infants, if possible, use prepared canned baby formula that requires no added water. When using concentrated or powdered formulas prepare with bottled water if the local water source is potentially contaminated.

## **Once the power is restored**

- Once the power is restored you will need to evaluate the safety of the food. If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, read the temperature when the power comes back on. If the thermometer stored in the freezer reads 40 degrees F or below the food is safe and may be refrozen. If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer,

check each package of food to determine the safety. Remember, you can't rely on appearance or odor. If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40 degrees F or below, it is safe to refreeze or cook.

Refrigerated food should be safe as long as the power is out for no more than 4 hours. Keep the door closed as much as possible. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish eggs or leftovers) that has been above 40 degrees F for 2 hours.

For a list of how to handle specific refrigerated and frozen foods during power outages, go to [www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/pubs/pofeature.htm](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/pubs/pofeature.htm).

## **Food and Water Safety During Hurricanes and Floods**

Hurricanes, especially if accompanied by a tidal surge or flooding, can contaminate the public water supply. Drinking contaminated water may cause illness. You cannot assume that the water in the hurricane-affected area is safe to drink. Listen to local announcements on safety of the water supply.

- If you do not have bottled water, and are not sure that your tap water is safe, follow these directions to purify tap water:
  - If you have a heat source available, boil the water vigorously (water should be bubbling and rolling) for 1 to 3 minutes. ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))
  - If you can't boil water, add 16 drops of newly purchased, unscented liquid household bleach per gallon of water, stir it well, and then let the water stand for 30 minutes before you use it. Note that using bleach will not kill parasitic organisms. ([www.epa.gov/OGWDW/faq/emerg.html](http://www.epa.gov/OGWDW/faq/emerg.html))
  - You can also use water-purifying tablets from your local pharmacy or sporting goods store. ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))
- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water. Discard any food without a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with floodwater. Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if you remove the labels thoroughly wash the cans, and then disinfect them with a solution consisting of 1/4 cup of bleach per gallon of water for clean surfaces. Re-label your cans, including the expiration date, with a marker. Food containers with screw-caps, snap lids, and home canned foods should be discarded if they have come in contact with flood water because they cannot be disinfected.
- Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers. There is no way to safely clean them if they have come in contact with contaminated flood waters. Thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes, and utensils with soap and hot water and

sanitize by boiling them in clean water or by immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of 1/4 cup of chlorine bleach per gallon of water.

For more information on safe food handling, check the Internet at [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov) or call FDA's toll-free information line at 1-888-SAFEFOOD.

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