



Facts about Food and Floods

Kansas State University • Cooperative Extension Service • Manhattan, Kansas

Is Food Safe to Eat?

Foods that have come in contact with flood waters or waters from broken pipes can be dangerous to use. This fact sheet is intended to help you judge the safety of your foods after a flood or power outage.

You can save many canned foods if they are not dented or damaged. Follow the cleaning methods recommended below. Throw away any pantry-type foods or fresh foods that came in direct contact with flood water. Flood water may carry silt, raw sewage, oil, or chemical wastes. Refrigerator/freezer foods will need to be thrown out if your power was out for an extended period of time. See "Power out" on the next page.

Discard

- Fresh produce
- All glass/jarred foods, including "never opened" jars such as mayonnaise and

Water for Drinking, Cooking, or Cleaning

After the flood, consider all water unsafe! Listen for public announcements on the safety of your local water supply before using any water for drinking, cooking, or cleaning. If you must use water from your faucet, bring water to a rolling boil for 1 minute (3 to 5 minutes if you live in a high altitude area). Boiling water will make water safe from bacterial, viral, and parasitic diseases. Contact your local health department for specific recommendations if there has been a chemical contamination of your water.

Consumer Tips

- Always keep cold foods cold (34-40° F); hot foods hot (140-165° F).
- Never keep perishable foods at room temperature for any longer than 2 hours; including time to prepare, serve, and eat.
- Keep EVERYTHING clean: hands, utensils, counters, cutting boards, and sink.

salad dressing. Containers with cork-lined, waxed cardboard, pop tops, peel-off tops, or paraffin (waxed) seals are nearly impossible to clean around the lid/opening.

- All foods in cardboard boxes (e.g., juice boxes), paper, foil, cellophane, cloth, or any other kind of flexible container.
- Canned goods that are dented (on lids or seams), leaking, or bulging.
- Canned goods that are rusted UNLESS the rust can be easily removed by light rubbing.
- Home canned foods
- Spices, seasonings and extracts
- Opened containers and packages of any kind.
- Flour, sugar, grains, pasta, coffee and other staples stored in canisters.

Save

Canned goods that are not bulging, leaking or dented. **HOWEVER, ALL CANS MUST BE THOROUGHLY CLEANED AND SANITIZED.**

THROW AWAY ANY CANS THAT MAY HAVE COME IN CONTACT WITH INDUSTRIAL OR SEPTIC WASTE. IF YOU ARE UNSURE ABOUT THE SAFETY OF ANY FOOD, THROW IT OUT!

Power out

Food in a refrigerator is generally safe if the power was out for less than 2 or 3 hours. Freezer foods will last longer. Food in a full, free-standing freezer will be safe for about 2 days; a half-full freezer for about 1 day. It is safe to refreeze thawed foods that still contain ice crystals. Do not rely on the appearance or odor of a food to determine if it is safe. Bacteria that cause foodborne illness can multiply rapidly on perishable foods that have been at room temperature for more than 2 hours.

DISCARD THE FOLLOWING PERISHABLE FOODS IF KEPT ABOVE REFRIGERATOR TEMPERATURE. (40° F) FOR MORE THAN 2 HOURS:

- raw or cooked meat, poultry or seafood
- milk/cream, yogurt, soft cheese
- cooked pasta, pasta salads
- custard, chiffon, or cheese pies
- fresh eggs, egg substitutes
- meat or cheese-topped pizza, luncheon meats
- casseroles, stew or soups
- mayonnaise, tartar sauce, and creamy dressings
- refrigerated cookie doughs
- cream-filled pastries

Cleaning Method for Canned Foods

1. Mark contents on the can with a permanent ink pen.
2. Remove paper labels as they can harbor dangerous bacteria.
3. Wash cans in a strong detergent solution with a scrub brush. Carefully clean areas around lids and seams.
4. Soak cans in a solution of 2 teaspoons of chlorine bleach per quart of room temperature water for 15 minutes.
5. Air dry cans before opening.

THE FOODS LISTED BELOW ARE GENERALLY SAFE WITHOUT REFRIGERATION FOR A FEW DAYS. However, double check each food and discard the food if it turns moldy or has an unusual odor or look. These foods spoil and lose quality much faster at warmer temperatures.

- butter, margarine
- fresh fruits and vegetables
- dried fruits
- opened jars of peanut butter, jelly, relish, taco sauce, barbecue sauce, ketchup, mustard, olives, oil-based salad dressings
- fruit juices
- hard or processed cheeses

Cleaning up the Kitchen

Remember to clean and sanitize any kitchen areas/items that have come in contact with flood waters.

- Scrub kitchen counters, pantry shelves, refrigerators, stoves with warm soapy water. Rinse and wipe with a solution of 2 teaspoons of chlorine bleach to one quart of water using a clean cloth.
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- Sanitize dishes and glassware the same way. To disinfect metal pans and utensils, boil them in water for 10 minutes.
- Discard wooden spoons, wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, and baby bottle nipples and pacifiers. These items may absorb or hide bacteria making them difficult to clean and sanitize.
- Wash all kitchen linens in detergent and hot water. Use chlorine bleach to sanitize the linens following directions on the bleach container.

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Would You Like to Know More?

For additional information about the safe handling of food, contact USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline toll-free at:

1-800-535-4555

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern time,
Monday through Friday
or contact your local
Cooperative Extension Service Office

For information on other flood-related safety issues, contact your local County Extension Office, your local or state health department, local American Red Cross chapter, or Civil Defense or emergency management office.

The text of this fact sheet is reprinted with minor changes from the USDA pamphlet, "Facts about food & floods: a consumer guide to food quality and safe handling after a flood or power outage."



Cooperative Extension Service
Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas

MF-2125

November 1993

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating, Richard D. Wootton, Associate Director. All educational programs and materials available without discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability.

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