

Handling Food through Floods

Preparedness is a key to food safety during a flood. If you expect a flood, keep an adequate supply of food, water and emergency equipment on hand. This includes enough canned food to last four to five days, a hand can opener, battery-powered radio, extra batteries and emergency cooking equipment like a camp stove with fuel to operate it.

Don't forget flashlights, candles, matches, a kerosene lamp, fire extinguisher and a first aid kit.

Fill the bathtub and large containers with water. Each person will need a gallon of water per day. Turn your refrigerator and freezer to the coldest setting. The colder food is before a possible power failure, the better it will last.

If you might or do lose power, a 50-pound block of dry ice should keep the food in a full 18-cubic-foot freezer safe for two days.

Dry ice registers minus 216 F, so wear gloves or use tongs when handling it. Wrap it in brown paper for longer storage and separate it from direct food contact with a piece of cardboard. Fill a partly empty freezer with crumpled newspaper to cut down on air currents that cause the dry ice to dissipate.

Raise refrigerators or freezers by putting cement blocks under their corners. If you keep canned goods and other foods in a basement or low cabinets, move them higher.

Flood water may carry silt, raw sewage, oil or chemical waste. If foods have been in contact with flood waters, use this chart to determine their safety.

“Flooded” Foods

Discard:

- Meat, poultry, fish and eggs
- Fresh produce
- Unopened jars with waxed paper, foil, cellophane or cloth
- All foods in cardboard boxes or with cardboard seals, such as mayonnaise and salad dressing
- Spices, seasonings and extracts
- Home-canned foods
- Opened containers and packages
- Flour, sugar, grains, coffee and other staples in canisters
- Canned foods that are dented, leaking, bulging or rusted
- Food in glass jars

Save:

Undamaged canned goods are safe if you sanitize the containers. Mark contents on can lid with indelible ink. Remove labels. Paper can harbor dangerous bacteria. Then wash cans in a strong detergent solution with a scrub brush.

Finally, immerse containers for 15 minutes in a solution of 2 teaspoons of chlorine bleach per quart of room temperature water. Air dry before opening.

Sanitize dishes and glassware the same way. To disinfect metal pans and utensils, boil them in water 10 minutes. Discard wooden spoons, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples, pacifiers and other porous materials.