



Safety After The Storm

Consumer Food Safety

In the aftermath of a natural disaster, you may be faced with assessing the safety of your food supply. Knowing what to do can help prevent a foodborne illness.

If power is lost, refrigerated and frozen perishable foods are not immediately unfit for human consumption. On average, an unopened refrigerator will maintain proper temperatures for perishable foods for about four hours. If the food looks or smells bad, then discard it, but otherwise, do not rely on a sensory evaluation when deciding what to keep:

- For perishable foods such as meat, poultry, fish, milk and leftovers, use a cleaned and sanitized probe thermometer to measure the internal temperature. Foods that have sustained an internal temperature of greater than 40°F for longer than two hours must be discarded because of the potential for foodborne illness, even if the food is properly cooked or reheated.
- To help determine which commonly refrigerated foods are considered perishable, use the following guide offered by the US Department of Health and Human Services:

www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/refridg_food.html

If the duration for which a food was held at an improper temperature cannot be determined, keep in mind the following: If you have a doubt, throw it out.

For frozen foods, an unopened freezer on average can maintain food at safe temperatures for 24 to 48 hours, depending on the amount of frozen food inside (the fuller the better). When deciding what to keep, if food is thawed or partially thawed, look for the presence of ice crystals on all packages of perishable foods, or use a cleaned and sanitized probe thermometer to determine the temperature of the food. If the internal temperature of the food is 40°F or below, it can be safely refrigerated or refrozen. If it can be determined that the internal temperature of a thawed, perishable food was not above 40°F for more than two hours, then the food can be refrigerated but not refrozen.



For more information, visit: www.ul.com/stormsafety



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Provided that an ample supply of ice is available, refrigerated and frozen food can be transferred to coolers to maintain safe temperatures.

- Surround foods with ice and replenish the ice regularly.
- Juices from raw animal products, such as meat, poultry and seafood, can contaminate other foods, especially ready-to-eat foods. Consider using a separate cooler for raw animal products, or enclose such products in storage bags that have a waterproof seal.

In areas prone to flooding, having food properly stored beyond the reach of rising waters is recommended. If food does come directly in contact with flood waters, the safest path is to discard it, to prevent microbiological, chemical and/or physical contamination. For certain types of waterproof food containers, it may be possible to examine and then clean and sanitize the exterior surfaces. More instructions regarding this practice are available on the FDA website, including recommended procedures:

www.fda.gov/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/ucmo76881.htm

In addition to sewage and other bacteriological waste that may be present in flood water, it is highly probable that chemical contamination will be present from household chemicals, automotive fluids and agricultural materials such as fertilizers and garden pesticides. If such contamination is expected or observed and cannot be effectively removed, then even food in waterproof containers should not be consumed.

About UL

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