

Cornell Cooperative Extension

Tompkins County

Education Center
615 Willow Avenue
Ithaca, NY 14850-
3555

Tel: 607 272-2292
Fax: 607 272-7088
tomkins@cce.cornell.edu
www.cce.cornell.edu/tompkins

General Family Preparedness FOOD SAFETY

Food safety precautions can make an important difference after a disaster occurs. Food can become contaminated as a result of fire, flood, and wind-related exposure. It also may spoil or become unsafe after a power outage.

Precautions Against Power Outages

If your area comes under an advisory that may lead to prolonged power outages (hurricanes, prolonged flooding, etc.), take these steps to help keep your food safe:

- ◆ Turn your refrigerator and freezer to the coldest setting. This will help the food stay frozen.
- ◆ Purchase a 50-pound block of dry ice. This will keep food in a full 18 cubic foot freezer safe for two days. Wrap it in brown paper for longer storage. Separate it from direct food contact with a piece of cardboard.
- ◆ Fill partially filled freezers with crumpled newspaper to reduce air currents which will dissipate dry ice.

After a Power Outage

If you should lose power, the emergency food supplies in your family disaster supply kit will be safe. Food in the refrigerator and freezer may be in trouble.

Generally, food in a refrigerator will be safe if the power is not out longer than a few hours and the temperature has been at 40°F or below. Food in a full, free-standing freezer should be safe for about two days if the temperature was set at 0°F or below. Food in a half-full freezer should be safe for about one day if the temperature was at 0°F or below. To prolong the life of your food, the following measures should be taken:

- ◆ Group meat and poultry to one side, or on a tray, so their juices won't contaminate other foods if they begin to thaw.
- ◆ Be wary of using meat, poultry, and foods containing milk, cream, sour cream, or soft cheese.
- ◆ Don't rely on odor or appearance of food. If perishable food has been at room temperature for more than two hours, discard it.

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Helping You Put Knowledge to Work

After a Power Outage

In emergency conditions, the following foods should keep at room temperature (above 40°F) a few days. Discard anything that turns moldy or has an unusual odor or look:

- ◆ Butter, margarine
- ◆ Fresh fruits and vegetables
- ◆ Dried fruits and coconut
- ◆ Opened jars of salad dressing, peanut butter, jelly, relish, taco sauce, barbecue sauce, mustard, catsup, olives
- ◆ Hard and processed cheeses
- ◆ Fruit juices
- ◆ Fresh herbs and spices
- ◆ Flour and nuts
- ◆ Fruit pies
- ◆ Bread, rolls, cakes, and muffins

Discard the following foods if kept for more than two hours above 40°F:

- ◆ Raw or cooked meat, poultry, and seafood
- ◆ Milk, cream, yogurt, soft cheese
- ◆ Cooked pasta, pasta salads
- ◆ Custard, chiffon, or cheese pies
- ◆ Fresh eggs, egg substitutes
- ◆ Meat-topped pizzas, lunch meats
- ◆ Casseroles, stews, or soups
- ◆ Mayonnaise and tartar sauce
- ◆ Refrigerator and cookie doughs
- ◆ Cream-filled pastries

Refreeze thawed foods that still contain ice crystals or feel cold.