

Food Safety During a Power Outage

If you are a licensed food premises, contact your nearest regional Health Protection office to obtain more information on appropriate measures to take during a power outage or other event that can affect food safety.

Potential for foodborne illness

During and after a prolonged power failure, the foods you keep in the refrigerator and freezer may become unsafe to eat. Bacteria can build up in perishable foods which may cause foodborne illness.

The most common symptoms of foodborne illness include stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache and fever. Symptoms may begin several hours to days after eating contaminated food. While most people recover completely, some individuals may suffer more serious effects. Those considered to be at higher risk include pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems.

Some organisms that have been associated with foodborne illness outbreaks include *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, *E.coli*, *Listeria*, Hepatitis A, and Noroviruses.

Be prepared: List of food safety items to have on hand during a power outage

- Food thermometer
- Coolers
- Freezer gel packs
- Manual or hand-held can opener
- Back-up power source: A generator may be used to temporarily supply power to refrigerators and freezers.
- Supply of shelf-stable, non-perishable foods and water
 - Ready-to-eat canned foods
 - Shelf-stable milk (UHT)
 - Canned fruits and juices
 - High energy foods such as peanut butter, trail mix or nuts
 - Ready-to-use baby formula (where applicable)
 - Bottled water: approximately one gallon of water per day is needed per person. You should store enough to last you and your family for at least 72 hours.

Tips to keep your food safe during a power outage

- In the case of a planned power outage, you can adjust the freezer temperature to the lowest setting beforehand. You can also turn down the refrigerator temperature but be careful so as to not freeze the food in the refrigerator.
- While the power is out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. An unopened refrigerator will keep foods cold for approximately **4 to 6 hours**. An unopened full freezer will keep food frozen for up **to 48 hours**, while a half full freezer will keep food frozen for about **24 hours**.

- If you think the power will be out for at least 4 hours, food can be kept cold in coolers with ice. Raw meat, poultry or fish should be kept in a separate cooler to prevent contamination of ready to eat foods. Food can also be moved to another location that has a properly functioning refrigerator and/or freezer.
- Frozen freezer packs or blocks of ice can help keep the temperature of your refrigerator/freezer colder when needed.
- Make sure raw meat, poultry or fish are placed in the coldest section of your refrigerator, on the very bottom shelf and kept away from ready to eat foods.
- Have a thermometer on hand to check refrigerator temperatures. Refrigerators, and the food they contain, should always be at or below 4°C (40°F).

When to throw food out

- Perishable foods that have been above 4°C (40°F) for less than 2 hours may be eaten immediately, or cooked and eaten immediately.
- Products in your freezer can be refrozen if ice crystals are still present.
- Throw out any thawed or perishable food that has been above 4°C (40°F) for more than two hours. Some examples are:
 - raw or cooked meat, poultry, seafood and luncheon meats
 - eggs
 - casseroles, stews or soups
 - milk and soft cheeses
 - homemade mayonnaise or dressings
 - cooked pasta, potatoes or rice
 - salads made with any of these foods
 - leftovers made with any of these foods
- Discard any food items with an unusual color or odor. Remember that contaminated food may not look or smell bad. Carefully inspect all food items and do not eat any food you think may not be safe. When in doubt, throw it out.
- Discard foods that have damaged packaging, such as packages that are crushed, dented or have deep rusting, as well as packages that have holes, leakage, punctures or swelling.
- Areas inside refrigerators, freezers, and containers used for temporary food storage that contain any spillage or leakage from raw food during thawing must be cleaned and sanitized. Homeowners may sanitize by using a mixture of 1 teaspoon of regular unscented household bleach and 1 liter of water.

Breast feeding & formula feeding

- During emergency situations, breastfeeding is the safest way to feed your baby/young child. Continue to breastfeed.
- If using infant formula, use safe tap water or bottled water and continue to bring the water to a rolling boil for 2 minutes but no longer as per manufacturer's recommendations. If you cannot boil your water use single serve ready to feed formula.
- When storing infant formula, prepared bottles **MUST** be refrigerated at **4°C (40°F)** and used within 24 HOURS. If you do not have power or safe water, use single serve, ready to feed infant formula.
- For further information visit: <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/h-s/pdf/en/HealthyPeople/BFI/safe-infant-feeding.pdf>

Your medication

- If you need information on proper storage of your prescription drugs that require refrigeration, such as insulin, call your doctor or local pharmacist.

For more information

Regional Health Protection Branch Offices:

http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/healthy_environments/content/regional_branch_offices.html

Canadian Food Inspection Agency fact sheet 'Food Safety in an Emergency':

<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/information-for-consumers/fact-sheets/food-handling/emergency/eng/1331578972167/1331579901110>

Public Safety - Emergency Measures Organization:

http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/public_safety/emo.html

Specific foodborne diseases:

http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/cdc/content/food_andwaterborne.html.

General food safety information:

http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/healthy_environments.html