

Hurricane Fact Sheet

After the Storm: Food and Water Safety

Severe storms often result in extended power losses and flooding. If you lost power for an extended period of time or your home flooded, then you need to take the following precautions:

Safe Food

Do not open freezers or refrigerators until you plan to use or discard the contents. An unopened refrigerator will keep foods safely cold for about 4 hours without power. Most freezers will keep food safe for 36 to 48 hours if left closed.

Once you open the refrigerator, discard any foods that have been above 41 degrees for more than four hours. Also discard any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture.

Thawed food can usually be used immediately if it is still at 41 degrees or colder. Do not refreeze completely thawed foods. Foods containing ice crystals may be refrozen.

Cans of food exposed to flood water should be thrown away. Cans of food exposed to rain water may be washed and sanitized, using a teaspoon of household bleach to one gallon of water.

If fresh fruits and vegetables or food in plastic, cardboard or paper containers have been under floodwaters, do not eat them; throw them away.

If you must discard food, try to bury it at least 48 inches deep. If burial is not possible, place the food in a sealed plastic bag or container for disposal in your local landfill.

Safe Drinking Water

If you rely on a public or private well for drinking water and it was flooded or you lost electricity, then you should boil your water for at least five minutes at a full rolling boil before using it for drinking, cooking, making ice or brushing teeth.

Infants under six months and pregnant women should not drink boiled water, because boiling water may concentrate nitrates that could harm them. They should drink bottled water. However, if bottled water is not available, it is better for them to drink boiled water than to drink untreated water and then to switch to bottled water when it becomes available.

You should continue to use bottled water or to boil your well-water until tests on samples taken since the last flooding or loss of electricity show the water is safe. Customers of public water systems should contact their utility or operator for information on the water quality. Private well users should contact their county health department for advice.

For more information about food or drinking water safety, call your local health department.

