

KEEPING FOOD AND WATER SAFE AFTER A POWER OUTAGE

As power is restored after a disaster, residents of damaged areas must be careful with food and water. Power outages in some areas may last several days, and maintaining proper refrigeration of food is a concern.

Water safety will also be a problem in some areas. There will be boil orders for many community water systems as the result of the loss of pressure that happens when the power goes out. Boil orders are issued as a precautionary measure because of the possibility that contaminated water may have entered the distribution system as a result of a loss in normal system pressure.

Frozen and refrigerated food supplies need to be evaluated carefully after a power outage to make sure that the food is safe to eat. The public is asked to work closely with the Department of Health's Environmental Health Specialists in the local county health units in all the affected areas to make sure they understand what they need to do to make sure their food and water supplies are safe. The U. S. Food and Drug Administration offers the following tips on keeping food safe following a power outage:

Be Prepared:

- Have a refrigerator thermometer.
- Know where you can get dry ice.
- Keep on hand a few days worth of ready-to-eat foods that do not require cooking or cooling, which depend on electricity.

When the Power Goes Out:

- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- The refrigerator will keep food cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened.
- Refrigerators should be kept at 40° F or below for proper food storage.

Once the Power is Restored:

- Check the temperature inside of your refrigerator and freezer.
- If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, check the temperature when the power comes back on. If the freezer thermometer reads 40° F or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen.
- If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine its safety. You can't rely on appearance or odor. If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40° F or below, it is safe to refreeze or cook.
- Refrigerated food should be safe as long as the power was out for no more than 4 hours. Keep the door closed as much as possible.
- Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs or leftovers) that has been above 40° F for two hours or more.

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Water

Water may not be safe to drink or cook with; however, unless told otherwise by local officials it should be safe for bathing, cleaning, etc.

- Listen to and follow public announcements. Local authorities will tell you if tap water is safe to drink or to use for cooking or bathing. If the water is not safe to use, follow local instructions to use bottled water or to boil or disinfect water for cooking, cleaning, or bathing. Boil water notices known to the Department of Health are listed on its website: <http://www.healthy.arkansas.gov/eng/autoupdates/boilordr.htm> or call **501-661-2623**
- If a boil order is issued for your area, water used for drinking or food preparation must be boiled briskly for one (1) minute prior to use.
- All ice water should be discarded, and only boiled or disinfected water used to make ice.
- Use only bottled, boiled, or treated water for drinking, cooking or preparing food, washing dishes, cleaning, brushing your teeth, washing your hands, making ice, and bathing until your water supply is tested and found safe. If your water supply is limited, you can use alcohol-based hand sanitizer for washing your hands.
- If you use bottled water, be sure it came from a safe source. If you do not know that the water came from a safe source, you should boil or treat it before you use it.

Feeding Infants and Young Children

- Breastfed infants should continue breastfeeding.
- For formula-fed infants, use ready-to-feed formula if possible. If using ready-to-feed formula is not possible, it is best to use bottled water to prepare powdered or concentrated formula.
- If bottled water is not available, use boiled water. Use treated water to prepare formula only if you do not have bottled or boiled water.
- If you prepare formula with boiled water, let the formula cool sufficiently before giving it to an infant.
- Clean feeding bottles and nipples with bottled, boiled, or treated water before each use.
- Wash your hands before preparing formula and before feeding an infant. You can use alcohol-based hand sanitizer for washing your hands if the water supply is limited.

Related Resources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

<http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d001401-d001500/d001474/d001474.html>

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater/facts.asp>

United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA):

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fsdisas.html> <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fsdisas5.html>

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fsdisa6a.html>

USA.gov:

<http://www.foodsafety.gov/>

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline: 1-888-MPHotline.

(Available for consumers' questions and concerns about food safety.)

For more information on protecting you and your family, go to the Arkansas Department of Health website at www.healthy.arkansas.gov or go to www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters



Arkansas Department of Health
Keeping Your Hometown Healthy