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# CC4 Revised 1982 Emergency Flood Information : Care of Food

Laurel Branen

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CARE OF FOOD

# **Emergency Flood Information**

By Laurel Branen, Extension Food and Nutrition Specialist

Among the cleanup problems after a flood, those related to food are critically important in preventing disease.

## **Is the Food Salvaged from the Flood Safe to Use?**

To prevent food-borne illness, diarrheal diseases and dysentery, destroy the following items if they have been exposed to flood waters: fresh meats, fish, poultry and eggs; fresh fruits and vegetables; prepared and processed foods; medicines and cosmetics; packages that are not hermetically sealed (airtight), including flour, oatmeal, and other commodities in bags and boxes.

## **Are Canned Foods Safe to Use?**

Since seepage can carry harmful bacteria into all but airtight containers, destroy the contents of crown-capped bottles, and screw-top glass containers (including canned food in glass jars). Sealed metal cans if punctured or leaking are unsafe.

If airtight cans are in good condition, they can be salvaged, but they must be carefully cleaned and disinfected before using the contents. Follow this procedure:

1. Remove and discard labels, keeping like foods together. (Do not let the labels touch any work surfaces.) After disinfecting the cans as directed below, identify the contents by labeling the cans with crayon or adhesive tape.
2. Wash cans in warm water containing soap or detergent. Change water frequently.
3. Soak the cans for at least one minute in a disinfecting chlorine solution made by mixing four tablespoons (60 ml) of liquid chlorine bleach (Clorox, Purex, Hilex, etc.) with two gallons (7.6 l) of water. Since chlorine and most of the other chemicals used as disinfecting solutions are poisonous, please read label directions.
4. Rinse cans in clean, cool water that has been boiled for at least ten minutes. Do not use cans which bulge, have an odor, or any other evidence of spoilage.

## **Is Frozen Food Safe to Use?**

If your home freezer has been covered by flood water, the food inside has most likely been damaged through seepage. Discard this food. If the electricity has been cut off, but no flood water has gotten inside the freezer, the amount of food within the box will determine its keeping qualities. A fairly full box will remain frozen for two to three days. Refreeze partially thawed meat immediately. If the meat has completely thawed, use it at once. Large quantities may be cooked and refrozen. Boxes of fruits and vegetables that are still firm may be refrozen. If there is some question as to the general condition of the food, discard it.

## **Is the Food in the Refrigerator Safe to Use?**

If the refrigerator has been covered by flood waters, discard the food inside.

If the refrigerator is not contaminated but the electricity is off, use perishable items such as milk immediately. The refrigerator will remain cold for 4-6 hours if the door is opened as little as possible.



### **How Should Cooking and Eating Utensils Be Cleaned?**

Wash dishes, pots, pans, cutting boards, utensils and flatware which have been exposed to floodwaters in hot, soapy water and disinfect by immersing for one minute in a chlorine solution made by mixing four tablespoons (60 ml) of liquid bleach with two gallons (7.6 l) of water. Rinse thoroughly in safe water. Pots, pans and other metal objects can be sterilized by boiling for at least 10 minutes. Throw away cracked or chipped dishes.

### **What Health Precautions Should Be Observed?**

1. Boil for ten minutes all water used for food preparation.
2. Wash hands in a disinfecting solution made by mixing one tablespoon (15 ml) of liquid chlorine bleach with one gallon (.95 l) of water.
3. If you lack refrigeration, prepare only as much food as can be eaten at one meal.
4. Do not serve homemade foods that spoil easily, such as ground meat dishes, hash, creamed foods or any mixture that contains small, cut pieces of ingredients. These foods can become contaminated by bacteria during preparation and cause food poisoning.
5. When purchasing formula ingredients for infants, be sure the containers are sealed. After opening in the home, cover tightly to prevent contamination. In the absence of refrigeration, prepare only enough formula for immediate use.
6. Avoid buying foods at bargain prices, especially from individuals. These are likely to be flood damaged.

### **What Can Be Done to Conserve Water?**

1. Save liquids from canned vegetables and substitute these for water in cooked dishes.
2. Drain and save juices from canned fruits. Use as a beverage or in making gelatin salads.
3. Use canned vegetable and fruit juices and canned milk as a beverage and in food preparation.
4. Prepare and eat foods in their original containers to reduce dishwashing. (Remember to open cans before heating.)

### **What Can Be Done to Conserve Cooking Fuel?**

1. Choose foods which cook quickly or require no cooking at all.
2. Prepare casseroles and one-dish meals.
3. Prepare foods on an outdoor grill, making sure that you have good ventilation.

**Contact your extension office for further information.**

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