



Food Safety and Inspection Service

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News Release

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USDA Offers Food Safety Tips for Areas Affected by Winter Storms

WASHINGTON, March 2, 2018 — The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is issuing food safety recommendations for those who may be impacted by winter storms in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Western regions of the U.S.

The National Weather Service reports that widespread snow, rain and strong winds developed overnight as a winter storm developed rapidly over the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic U.S. Numerous warnings have been issued for these areas, including winter weather advisories, winter storm warnings and high wind warnings. The National Weather Service also reports heavy snow and rain across much of the Western U.S.

Winter storms can present the possibility of power outages and flooding that can compromise the safety of stored food. Residents in the path of this storm should pay close attention to the forecast. FSIS recommends that consumers take the following steps to reduce food waste and the risk of foodborne illness during this and other severe weather events.

Steps to follow in advance of losing power:

- Keep appliance thermometers in both the refrigerator and the freezer to ensure temperatures remain food safe during a power outage. Safe temperatures are 40°F or lower in the refrigerator, 0°F or lower in the freezer.
- Freeze water in one-quart plastic storage bags or small containers prior to a storm. These containers are small enough to fit around the food in the refrigerator and freezer to help keep food cold. Remember, water expands when it freezes, so don't overfill the containers.
- Freeze refrigerated items, such as leftovers, milk and fresh meat and poultry that you may not need immediately—this helps keep them at a safe temperature longer.
- Know where you can get dry ice or block ice.
- Have coolers on hand to keep refrigerator food cold if the power will be out for more than four hours.
- Group foods together in the freezer—this 'igloo' effect helps the food stay cold longer.
- Keep a few days' worth of ready-to-eat foods that do not require cooking or cooling.

Steps to follow if the power goes out:

- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. A refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours if the door is kept closed. A full freezer will hold its temperature for about 48 hours (24 hours if half-full).
- Place meat and poultry to one side of the freezer or on a tray to prevent cross contamination of thawing juices.

- Use dry or block ice to keep the refrigerator as cold as possible during an extended power outage. Fifty pounds of dry ice should keep a fully-stocked 18-cubic-foot freezer cold for two days.

Food safety after a flood:

- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water—this would include raw fruits and vegetables, cartons of milk or eggs.
- Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water. Food containers that are not waterproof include those packaged in plastic wrap or cardboard, or those with screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops and crimped caps. Flood waters can enter into any of these containers and contaminate the food inside. Also, discard cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes and home-canned foods if they have come in contact with flood water, because they cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized.
- Inspect canned foods and discard any food in damaged cans. Can damage is shown by swelling, leakage, punctures, holes, fractures, extensive deep rusting or crushing/denting severe enough to prevent normal stacking or opening with a manual, wheel-type can opener.

Food safety during snow and ice storms:

During a snowstorm, do not place perishable food out in the snow. Outside temperatures can vary and food can be exposed to unsanitary conditions and animals. Instead, make ice by filling buckets or cans with water and leave them outside to freeze. Use this ice to help keep food cold in the freezer, refrigerator or coolers.

Steps to follow after a weather emergency:

- Check the temperature inside of your refrigerator and freezer. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, seafood, eggs or leftovers) that has been above 40°F for two hours or more.
- Check each item separately. Throw out any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture or feels warm to the touch.
- Check frozen food for ice crystals. The food in your freezer that partially or completely thawed may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is 40°F or below.
- Never taste a food to decide if it's safe.
- When in doubt, throw it out.

FSIS' YouTube video "[Food Safety During Power Outages](#)" has instructions for keeping frozen and refrigerated food safe. The publication "[A Consumer's Guide to Food Safety: Severe Storms and Hurricanes](#)" can be downloaded and printed for reference during a power outage. An [infographic](#) is also available outline steps you can take before, during and after severe weather, power outages and flooding. FSIS provides relevant food safety information during disasters on Twitter [@USDAFoodSafety](#) and [Facebook](#).

If you have questions about food safety during severe weather, or any other food safety topics, call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline at 1-888MPHotline or chat live with a food safety specialist at [AskKaren.gov](#). These services are available in English and Spanish from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday. Answers to frequently asked question can also be found 24/7 at [AskKaren.gov](#).

NOTE: Access news releases and other information at FSIS' website at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/recalls>.
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