



Food Safety During a Power Outage

Why do power outages occur?

Power outages can happen for many different reasons. High winds can blow trees onto power lines, lightning can hit the lines or the power boxes/transformers, vehicle accidents can take down power poles, snow and ice on power lines can bring the lines down with their weight. This handout should provide you with some information on how to keep your families food safe during a power outage.

Reason for concern

Foods that are not properly refrigerated (or cooked) can have bacteria in them that can make you and your family sick. These bacteria can double in number every 20 minutes when at room temperature so we must stay aware of the conditions we store our perishable foods in. Some bacteria cause diarrhea and vomiting, in severe cases with certain bacteria or pre existing illness, death can occur.

Preventive Measures

Keep your freezers at -18°C (0°F) and your fridge at 4°C (40°F) at all times. Have a few picnic coolers and ice or freezer packs on hand and frozen at all times. Have ready to eat canned foods available that don't require cooking or can be heated on a bbq or open fire during power outages.

These include:

canned meats
canned beans
powdered milk
peanut butter
trail mix or nuts
infant formula

Have a good supply of bottled water on hand and a thermometer to check your picnic cooler temperature or the temperature of heated foods for safety. Perishable food should be held at 4°C (40°F) and cooked foods should be cooked to 74°C (165°F) and held hot at 60°C (140°F).

Freezers can keep foods cold enough during a power outage for as long as 48 hours if the freezer is full and as long as 24 hours if it is half full as long as the door stays shut!

Fridges can maintain their temperature for 4-6 hours if the door stays shut. Placing ice in a fridge or freezer can help keep it cold if you have any on hand.

After a Power Outage

Your community may be on a boil water advisory so make sure you check your water supply before you use it.

Review any refrigerated items. Items that were over 4°C(40°F) for more than 2 hours and foods that have an unusual color or odor should be discarded. Specifically: meats, poultry and fish, casseroles and stews, milk and soft cheeses, any cooked foods or salads.

Review any frozen items. Items that still have ice crystals or are at 4°C (40°F) or below can be refrozen except for frozen dinners and ice cream. If the foods were at 4°C (40°F) or warmer for more than 2 hours, they should be discarded.

Fridge and Freezer Odors

Your fridges and freezers may have an odour if the outage was for an extended period. Once you have removed and discarded foods as per the advice above: Wash the fridge or freezer with hot water and soap, rinse with a sanitizing solution such as 1 tablespoon of unscented household bleach in one gallon of water. Leave the door open for 15 minutes.

If there is still an odour, you can try wiping the unit with a vinegar and water solution, leaving the door open for several days. Another option is to crumple up newspaper, sprinkle baking soda on a plate or place vanilla on a cotton swab or paper towel and leave it in the unit.