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Together, we can save a life

Keep Food and Drinking Water Safe

Food may not be safe to eat during and after an emergency. Safe water for drinking, cooking and washing includes bottled, boiled or treated water. Your state or local health department can make specific recommendations for boiling or treating water in your area after a disaster. Watch or listen to your local news for reports on the safety of your water. **Do NOT ever use water that you think may be contaminated to wash dishes, brush teeth, prepare food, wash hands, make ice, or make baby formula.**

Contaminated Water

Water may not be safe to drink, clean with, or bathe in after an emergency such as a hurricane or flood. Water can become contaminated with bacteria, sewage, agricultural or industrial waste, chemicals, and other substances that can cause illness or death. Contaminated water should not be used for any purpose. Consider all water from wells, cisterns, and other delivery systems in the disaster area to be unsafe until tested.

Here's what to do when the water supply is unsafe:

- Use your emergency supply of water.
- Use water from melted ice cubes made before the disaster occurred
- Use water from undamaged hot water tanks and water pipes. Turn off the main water valve before draining water from these sources.
- Bottled juices and the liquid from canned fruits and vegetables are another source of water.
- Listen to and follow public announcements from local authorities. Public announcements will be made when tap water becomes safe.
- 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 gel sanitizers for washing your hands.
- If you use bottled water, make sure it comes from a safe source. If you are not sure where the water came from, you should boil or treat it before you use it.

How to Treat Water

Boiling water is the is the safest method for killing harmful bacteria and parasites.

1. Strain water through a clean cloth to remove bulk impurities.
2. Bring water to a rolling boil and let it continue boiling for at least 1 minute. This will kill most organisms, but not chemicals.
3. Let the water cool before drinking it. Boiled water will taste better if you pour it water back and forth between two clean containers. This helps to put oxygen back into the water.
4. Boiling water will not remove chemical contaminants. If water is contaminated with chemicals, seek another source of water, such as bottled water.

If you can't boil water, you can treat it with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or unscented household chlorine bleach (5.25-6.0% sodium hypochlorite). If you use chlorine tablets or iodine tablets, follow the directions that come with the tablets.

Here is how to use household chlorine bleach—

1. Use chlorine bleach from a freshly opened bottle. Do not use scented bleaches, color-safe bleaches, or bleaches with added cleaners.
2. Mix 1/8 teaspoon of bleach with a gallon of clear water. For cloudy water, use 1/4 teaspoon of bleach per gallon.
3. Mix the solution thoroughly and let it stand for about 30 minutes before using it.
4. If the water has a slight scent of chlorine, you can use it. If you can't smell chlorine, discard the water and find another source.

Clean and Sanitize Surfaces

- Clean and sanitize food contact surfaces and containers that will be used to store water:
 1. Clean surfaces thoroughly with soap and water, then rinse.
 2. For gallon- or liter-sized containers, add approximately 1 teaspoon (4.9 mL) household bleach (5.25%) with 1 cup (240 mL) water to make a bleach solution.
 3. Cover the container and shake the bleach solution thoroughly, allowing it to contact all inside surfaces.
 4. Let stand covered for 30 minutes, then rinse with clean, drinkyng water.
 5. Allow to air dry
- Discard wooden cutting boards, wood or plastic utensils, and baby bottle nipples and pacifiers if they have come into contact with floodwater. There is no way to safely clean them.
- Use hot soapy water to thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes and utensils that have come into contact with floodwater. Sanitize dishes by boiling them in clean or properly treated water or by immersing them for 10 to 15 minutes in a solution of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach per quart of water.

Identify Unsafe Food

- Throw away food that may have come in contact with flood or storm water.
- Throw away food that has an unusual odor, color or texture.
- You cannot rely solely on appearance or odor. Never taste food to determine its safety. Some foods may look and smell fine, but if they have been at room temperature too long, bacteria that cause food-borne illness can begin to grow very rapidly. Some types of bacteria produce toxins that are not destroyed by cooking.
- Throw away food in your refrigerator or freezer that has been exposed to temperatures above 40° F (4° C) for two hours or more.
- Throw away any fully cooked items in either the freezer or the refrigerator that have come in contact with raw meat juices.
- Throw away canned goods that are bulging, opened, or damaged.
- Food containers with screw-caps, snap-lids, crimped caps (soda pop bottles), twist caps, flips tops, snap-open, and home canned goods should be thrown away if they have come into contact with floodwater. They cannot be disinfected.

Store Food Safely While the Power is Out

- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. First, use perishable food from the refrigerator. A refrigerator will keep food cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened.
- Then, use the food from the freezer. To minimize the number of times you open the freezer door, post a list of freezer contents on it. A full freezer will keep the temperature for about 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door remains closed.
- Finally, begin to use nonperishable foods and staples.
- Obtain dry or block ice to keep your refrigerator as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for a prolonged period of time.
- If you are not sure a particular food is cold enough, take its temperature with the food thermometer. Throw out any perishable foods (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftovers) that have been exposed to temperatures over 40° F (4°C) for two hours or more, and any food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture, or feels warm to the touch.
- Keep food in a dry, cool spot and keep it covered at all times.
- Open food boxes or cans carefully so that you can close them tightly after each use.
- If cans have come in contact with flood or storm water, remove the label, wash the cans and dip them in a solution of 1 cup of bleach mixed with 5 gallons of water. Re-label the cans with a marker once dry.

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration.

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