



Questions about food and water safety when the power goes out

From the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

Food Safety

If the power is out for less than 2 hours, then the food in your refrigerator and freezer will be safe to consume. While the power is out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to keep food cold for longer. If the power is out for longer than 2 hours, follow the guidelines below:

- For the Freezer section: A freezer that is half full will hold food safely for up to 24 hours. A full freezer will hold food safely for 48 hours. Do not open the freezer door if you can avoid it.
- For the Refrigerated section: Pack milk, other dairy products, meat, fish, eggs, gravy, and spoilable leftovers into a cooler surrounded by ice. Inexpensive Styrofoam coolers are fine for this purpose.
- Use a digital quick-response thermometer to check the temperature of your food right before you cook or eat it. Throw away any food that has a temperature of more than 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

Safe Drinking Water

When power goes out, water purification systems may not be functioning fully. Safe water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene includes bottled, boiled, or treated water. Your state or local health department can make specific recommendations for boiling or treating water in your area. Here are some general rules concerning water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene. Remember:

- Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, **or make baby formula**. If possible, use baby formula that does not need to have water added. You can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to wash 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. Use only bottled, boiled, or treated water until your supply is tested and found safe.
- Boiling water, when practical, is the preferred way to kill harmful bacteria and parasites. Bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute will kill most organisms.
- When boiling water is not practical, you can treat water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or unscented household chlorine bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite):
 - If you use chlorine tablets or iodine tablets, follow the directions that come with the tablets.
 - If you use household chlorine bleach, add 1/8 teaspoon of bleach per gallon of water if the water is clear. For cloudy water, add 1/4 teaspoon of bleach per gallon. Mix the solution thoroughly and let it stand for about 30 minutes before using it.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

Your Community Partner in Public Health

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