

From the Office of the Governor:

The Department of Health and Senior Services urges all residents to throw away any food that may have come in contact with flood or storm waters and individuals that have suffered power outages should keep their refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature.

"Perishable food such as meat, poultry, seafood, milk, and eggs that are not kept adequately refrigerated or frozen may cause illness if consumed, even when they are thoroughly cooked," said Health and Senior Services Commissioner Mary O'Dowd.

Commissioner O'Dowd urged all residents to dispose of any perishable food that may have been above 40 degrees for two hours or more. Food will stay cold in the refrigerator for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will keep the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door remains closed. However, food above 40 degrees for 2 hours or more must be discarded.

Thawed food that contains ice crystals or is 40 degrees or below can be refrozen or cooked. If you plan to eat refrigerated or frozen meat, poultry, fish or eggs while it is still at safe temperatures, it's important that each item is thoroughly cooked to the proper temperature to assure that any foodborne bacteria that may be present is destroyed.

Information about municipalities that have issued boiled water advisories as well as instructions for safely boiling water for drinking can be found at http://www.state.nj.us/cgi-bin/dhss/njnewsline/view_article.pl?id=3766

Below are some additional food safety tips to prevent illness during power outages, flooding and hurricane conditions:

Add block ice or dry ice to your refrigerator if the electricity is expected to be off for more than four hours. Fifty pounds of dry ice should keep an 18-cubic foot fully-stocked freezer cold for two days.

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 with screw-off caps, snap lids and pull tops.

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.

Check to ensure that the freezer temperature is at or below 0 °F and the refrigerator is at or below 40 degrees

Wash fruits and vegetables with water from a safe source before eating.

For infants, if using formula, try to use prepared, canned baby formula that requires no added water. When using concentrated or powdered formulas, prepare with bottled water if the local water source is potentially contaminated.

During power outages, the appliance thermometers will indicate the temperatures in the refrigerator and freezer to help you determine if the food is safe.

Once Power is Restored . . .

You'll need to determine the safety of your food. Here's how:

If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, check the temperature when the power comes back on. If the freezer thermometer reads 40 degrees or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen.

If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine its safety. You can't rely on appearance or odor. If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40 degrees or below, it is safe to refreeze or cook.

Refrigerated food should be safe as long as the power was out for no more than 4 hours and the refrigerator door was kept shut. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs or leftovers) that has been above 40°F for two hours or more.

For additional information on food safety and power outages, please visit http://www.nj.gov/health/natural_shtml and <http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/recovery.asp>.