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CC4 Revised 1979 Emergency Flood Information: Care of Food

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Emergency Flood Information

CARE OF FOOD STACKS
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By Teresa Shaffer, Extension Specialist (Food and Nutrition)

Among the cleanup problems after the flood are those related to food.

Is the Food Salvaged from the Flood Safe to Use?

To prevent food-borne illness, diarrheal diseases and dysentery, the following items should be destroyed if they have been exposed to flood waters: fresh meats and poultry; prepared and processed foods; medicines and cosmetics; packages that are not hermetically sealed (airtight), including flour, packaged frozen foods and other commodities in bags.

May Canned Foods be Used?

Since seepage can carry harmful bacteria into all but airtight containers, the contents of crown-capped bottles, and screw-top glass containers (including canned food in glass jars) should be destroyed. Sealed metal cans if punctured or leaking are unsafe.

If airtight cans are in good condition, they can be salvaged. But they **must** be carefully cleaned and **disinfected before using the contents.**

Follow this procedure:

1. Remove labels. Keep the same kinds of foods together, or mark them in a way that will enable you to identify them after disinfection. Colored crayon or adhesive tape may be used.
2. Wash cans in warm water containing soap or detergent.
3. Soak the cans for at least one minute in a disinfecting chlorine solution (Clorox, Purex, Hilex, etc.) made by mixing four tablespoons (60 ml) of liquid chlorine bleach with two gallons (7.6 l) of water. (Chlorine and most of the other chemicals used as disinfecting solutions are poisonous. Please read label directions.) Rinse in clean, cool water that has been boiled for at least five minutes. Do not use any jars or cans having an odor or other evidence of spoilage.

Is Home-Frozen Food Safe to Use?

If your home freezer has been covered with flood waters, chances are that the food inside has been damaged through seepage. This food should be discarded.

If the electricity has been cut off, but no flood water has gotten inside, the amount of food within the box will determine its keeping qualities. Generally speaking, if the refrigerator has been out for more than six hours, items should be discarded. Don't refreeze frozen foods which have been thawed more than four hours. If there is some question as to the general condition of a food, it should be discarded.

How Should Cooking and Eating Utensils be Cleaned?

Dishes, pots, pans and silverware exposed to floodwaters should be washed in hot, soapy water, rinsed thoroughly in safe water, then disinfected by immersing for one minute in a chlorine solution—four tablespoons (60 ml) of liquid bleach in two gallons (7.6 l) of water. Pots, pans and other metal objects can be sterilized by boiling for at least 10 minutes. Throw away cracked or chipped dishes.

What Information is Available to Insure Safe and Easier Meal Preparation?

1. Boil for 10 minutes all water used for food preparation.
2. Wash hands and cooking utensils in a disinfecting solution made by mixing one tablespoon (15 ml) of liquid laundry bleach with one gallon (.95 l) of water.
3. Conserve fuel, water and energy, as well as the number of cooking and serving utensils, by preparing casseroles and one-dish meals, such as stews, pot roasts, and thick, nourishing soups.
4. Save the liquids of canned vegetables. Substitute them for water in recipes for soups, stews and other cooked dishes.
5. Drain and save juices from canned fruits. They may be mixed and combined with other canned fruit juices and used as beverages and in making gelatin salads or desserts, instead of using scarce water.
6. If your oven is in working condition, use it to cook stews, vegetables and other foods. Oven cooking will require less attention and free you to do other tasks while the meal cooks.
7. If you lack refrigeration, cook only as much as can be eaten at one meal. If you have refrigeration, save time by preparing food for several meals in advance.
8. When purchasing formula ingredients, evaporated or dry skim milk for infants, be sure the containers are sealed. After opening in the home, be sure they are tightly covered to prevent contamination. In the absence of refrigeration, make up only enough formula for immediate use.
9. Avoid foods that are subject to quick spoilage and bacterial contamination such as creamed foods, hash, custards and pies, salads and sandwiches mixed with mayonnaise or other perishables, unless refrigeration is available.
10. Hashes, croquettes, meat pies and ground meats are easily spoiled and contaminated. If used, they should be served promptly.
11. Avoid keeping prepared or cooked food at room temperature. Keep hot foods **hot** and cold foods **cold**.

In general, commercially canned and packaged foods are recommended:

1. Canned dried milk.
2. Canned meats, fish, poultry
3. Canned or packaged staples
4. Canned fruits or vegetables
5. Canned juices
6. Packaged, dried or dehydrated foods
7. Canned or packaged biscuits, breads, crackers, cookies

Contact your county extension office for further information.

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