

Safe food and medicine after a flood

Food, medicines and cosmetics

Discard food, medicines, and cosmetics that were not in water tight containers and that were exposed to flood waters. Flood waters may carry raw sewage, oil, or chemical wastes.

Canned food and food in glass jars

Undamaged canned goods can be saved even if completely submerged. Canned goods need to have the contents marked with a permanent ink pen. Remove the labels and then wash the cans in a strong detergent solution using a scrub brush. Carefully clean areas around the lids and seams. The cans then need to be soaked in a solution of unscented liquid household bleach (such as Clorox or Purex) using 2 teaspoonfuls of the bleach per quart of room temperature water. Keep the cans in the solution for 15 minutes and then allow to air dry before opening. Cans that have leaks, dents or are bulging need to be discarded because they may be contaminated.

Jams, jellies, and other foods that are in glass, plastic jars or bottles that have screw caps or crimped caps need to be discarded because flood water contamination can get under the lid and contaminate the food. Foods that are packed in cellophane, paper, cloth, or cardboard need to be discarded.

Fruits and vegetables

Fruits and vegetables need to be discarded if they came into contact with flood waters. Fruits and vegetables that have not been contaminated can be consumed but should always be washed before use.

Refrigerated foods

Refrigerated foods such as meat, poultry, and eggs should be safe as long as the power was out only a few hours. If refrigeration has been off longer than a few hours, these foods may not be safe to consume because the temperature has risen above 41° F. Full freezers can keep food frozen for about 2 days and half full freezers for one day. Discard food from the freezer if the power has been out longer than these times. **WARNING: When in doubt, throw it out!**

Cleaning and disinfecting the refrigerator and the freezer

Thoroughly clean the interior and exterior of refrigerators and freezers with soap and clean water. Disinfect inside surfaces with a solution of 3/4 cup liquid household, chlorine bleach to one gallon of warm water.

If odor persists, place about 3 ounces of activated charcoal (available at drugstores) in an open container in the refrigerator or freezer. Food may remain with the charcoal. After 3 to 6 hours, put the charcoal in a moderate oven to drive off the odor and to "reactivate" it. Repeat these steps as necessary. Save the charcoal - you can reuse it.

