



Food Safety During a Power Outage

Most households will face a power outage at some point as a result of a snow or ice storm, wind storm, lightning strike, or other interference with power lines. These power outages can pose a threat to the safety of food supplies. Without electrical power, freezers and refrigerators will lose the ability to keep foods at safe temperatures.

Foods stored in freezers need to be held at -18°C or lower, and fridges must be at 4°C or lower, to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria and other germs.

Preparing for a power outage:

If you have warning that your electrical power will be interrupted or you live in an area subject to power failures during storms:

- Place an appliance thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer. This will help you determine if food is safe during power outages. The refrigerator temperature should be 4°C or lower and the freezer should be -18°C or lower to keep food safe.
- Turn the refrigerator or freezer control to its coldest setting.
- Keep several freezer gel packs frozen in your freezer.
- If there is space in your freezer, fill containers with water and freeze. These blocks of ice will help maintain temperatures in your freezer and fridge. If your normal water supply is contaminated or unavailable, the melting ice will also supply drinking water.
- Freeze refrigerated items such as leftovers, milk, and fresh meat and poultry that you may not need immediately. This helps keep them at a safe temperature longer.



- Pack food tightly together in the freezer. This helps the food stay cold longer.
- Know where you can obtain block ice for use in your freezer and refrigerator.
- Keep coolers on hand to store refrigerated food in case the power goes out for more than 4 hours.
- If electrical power may be off for a long period of time, take food to a friend or neighbour's freezer where the power is on, if possible.

During a power outage:

- Note the time the power outage started in order to track how long your refrigerator(s) and freezer(s) have been without power; knowing this will help you determine which foods may be safe to eat and which ones are not.
- Keep the fridge and freezer doors closed as much as possible to keep the food within a safe temperature range for as long as possible.

- A refrigerator without power should keep food cool for about four to six hours if the door is kept closed. A full freezer without power will keep items frozen for about two days. A half full freezer will keep items frozen for about one day.
- Place perishable items such as meats, dairy and seafood in the coldest section of the fridge. Better yet, meats and seafood may be stored in the freezer.
- Place ice inside fridges and freezers to help keep them cold.
- If using baby formula, make up only enough for immediate use. Consider powdered formula which will not require refrigeration after opening.
- If the power stays out for a long time, buy block ice to keep the refrigerator and freezer as cold as possible.
- If possible transfer food to a friend or family member's refrigerator or freezer that is operating.
- Contact your doctor or pharmacist for information about proper storage of medication that requires refrigeration, such as insulin.

After power has been restored:

- Check the temperature of perishable foods, and consider how long the food may have been out of the safe temperature range. If a fridge or freezer has been without power for an extended period of time, and you are unsure about the safety of your perishable foods, discard them.
- Throw out any perishables that have been sitting in the fridge or freezer at 4°C or higher for more than two hours.
- Discard any food that has an obvious strange colour or odour. However,



harmful bacteria can multiply in food without making the food appear or smell bad. Never taste food to determine its safety.

- Evaluate each item in your freezer separately. You may safely refreeze foods if they still contain ice crystals or if they have been kept at 4°C or below for no more than two days. Partial thawing and refreezing of these foods may reduce the quality of the food, but the food will remain safe to eat.
- Remember the golden rule of food safety: When in doubt, throw it out.

The following foods are more likely to cause foodborne illness and should be discarded if stored above 4°C (40°F) for two hours or more:

- raw or cooked meat, poultry, seafood and luncheon meats
- casseroles, stews or soups
- milk and soft cheeses
- prepared infant formula or open jars of baby food

- leftovers
- homemade mayonnaise or dressings
- cooked pasta, potatoes, rice or vegetables
- salads made with any of these foods

Foods that can be stored above 4°C (40°F) for several days include:

- butter and margarine
- hard or processed cheese
- fresh fruits and vegetables
- mustard, ketchup, olives
- salad dressings, peanut butter, barbeque sauce
- jam and jellies
- bread, rolls, bagels, cakes (without cream or custard), cookies and muffins

