

Food Safety During Power Outages

Video Transcript

Whether it's tumultuous thunderstorms, or whipping winds, or mountains of snow...the force of Mother Nature can be tremendous, not to mention crippling to our power sources.

We take our lights for granted. But when the power goes off and the lights go out, knowing what to do with the food in your refrigerator and freezer can help you stay safe. The last thing you need after a weather emergency is a case of food poisoning.

First, make sure you have appliance thermometers in both your refrigerator and freezer. You can buy appliance thermometers in many grocery and hardware stores. The temperature in your refrigerator should be 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below and the temperature in your freezer should be zero degrees Fahrenheit or lower.

Also, keep on hand at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food items that don't require refrigeration or cooking, things like canned goods and boxed milk.

When severe weather is forecast, freeze ice and gel packs or containers of water ahead of time to help keep your food cold in the refrigerator, freezer, or coolers in case you lose power.

You can also 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 if you lose power.

If the power goes out, keep your refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature. Your refrigerator should keep food cold for about 4 hours if it's not opened. A fully-stocked freezer should remain cold for about 48 hours. If the freezer's not full, about 24 hours.

When the power returns, check the freezer thermometer. If it's 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below or if frozen foods still have ice crystals, you can safely refreeze or cook the food. If the power was off for more than 4 hours, throw out all perishable food in your refrigerator, such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk, and leftovers.

Never taste food to determine if it's safe and don't depend on how the food looks or smells either. Unsafe food can look and smell normal and can make you sick even if you cook it thoroughly. When in doubt, throw it out!

Keeping these simple tips in mind will help keep your food safe if you lose power.

For more information on food safety, visit www.fda.gov or www.foodsafety.gov.

