



FOOD SAFETY

“When in Doubt, Throw it Out!”

Food Safety after a Natural Disaster

In the wake of Hurricane Irma, the Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA) Food Safety Division encourages consumers to be mindful of potential public health risks associated with food and water after power loss and flooding in many areas across the state.

“GDA Food Safety Inspectors have had boots on the ground since Tuesday, to help mitigate potential food safety risks for consumers,” Agriculture Commissioner Gary W. Black said. “We encourage consumers to heed the following suggestions to help maintain a high level of food safety in their own homes.”

The most important advice is, **“When in doubt, throw it out!”** Unsafe food can make you sick even if it looks, smells, and tastes normal. Never taste food to determine if it is still “safe” to eat.

Here are some additional tips, with answers to common questions relating to food safety:

I lost power for more than 24 hours. Is the food in my refrigerator safe to eat? No. Refrigerated food is only safe to eat if the power loss lasted four (4) hours or less (and the fridge door was kept shut, keeping the cold air in). Immediately toss any food with an unusual odor, color or texture. Discard all perishable food (meat, poultry, eggs, leftovers, etc.) that has been at temperatures above 41 °F for more than two (2) hours.

What about the food in my freezer? If any food in the freezer was completely defrosted during power loss **and** may have reached temperatures above 41 °F for more than two hours, it should all be thrown away. If your freezer is fully stocked, food should be safe if the power was out no more than 48 hours (2 days or less). If the freezer was about half-full, food may be safe if power loss lasted 24 hours (1 day or less).

I had some flooding in my home, including in my kitchen. Is that food safe to eat? If food has come into contact with flood/storm water, throw it away. Throw away food that may have come in contact with flood or storm water; perishable foods that have not been refrigerated properly due to power outages; and those with an unusual odor, color, or texture.

How do I know if my water is safe to drink? Drinking water may be contaminated after a natural disaster like Hurricane Irma. Do not use water you suspect or have been told is unsafe to wash dishes, brush teeth, wash/prepare food, make ice, or make baby formula. If you are unsure how your water supply is being affected, always err on the side of caution and use bottled water.

Is my well water safe to drink? Not if flooding occurred in or around your area. Flood waters often contaminate well water with livestock waste, human sewage, chemicals and other contaminants. Any of these can lead to illness when used for drinking, bathing, or other hygiene practices.

Can I make water safe in my home? After a disaster, a **Boil Water Advisory** may be issued for certain cities or counties, and consumers should always follow instructions in the advisory. This often means any public water must be boiled for at least one (1) minute (brought to a roiling boil) to make it safe. Then it can be used for cleaning or cooking, or cooled and used for drinking and for personal hygiene (e.g., brushing your teeth, bathing, etc.). Boiling is the surest method to make water safer to drink by killing disease-causing organisms, including viruses, bacteria, and parasites. You can improve the flat taste of boiled water by pouring it from one clean, disinfected container to another and then allowing it to stand for a few hours, OR by adding a pinch of salt for each quart or liter of boiled water.
IMPORTANT: Water contaminated with fuel or toxic chemicals cannot be made safe by boiling or disinfection. Use a different source of water if you know or suspect that water might be contaminated with fuel or toxic chemicals.

After flood waters have receded, clean your kitchen by thoroughly washing pans, dishes, utensils and countertops/food prep surfaces, etc., with soap and hot water. Rinse and then sanitize by applying a solution of one (1) tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water and let air dry.

Continue to monitor our website at <http://agr.georgia.gov/gda-hurricane-response.aspx> for the most up-to-date information, and follow us on Twitter and Instagram via the handle “GDAFoodSafety.”

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