

Food Safety in an Emergency

Be prepared for emergencies

Preparing yourself and your family for emergencies could save lives.

Get to know the **potential emergencies** that could affect your neighbourhood. Emergencies can be situations such as chemical spills or power outages. They can also be natural events such as

- earthquakes
- floods
- landslides
- tornadoes
- winter storms
- wildfires

For example, if you live in an area that is often affected by floods, plan to store your food on shelves so that it will be away from potentially contaminated water.

By planning ahead and taking practical steps to prepare, you can do your part to stay safe during an emergency.

Make a plan and get a kit

As a household:

- create an [emergency plan](#)
- prepare [emergency kits](#) to use at home and in your vehicle

Remember that in case of a major event you must prepare to be self-sufficient for at least 72 hours while emergency workers focus on people in urgent need.

For a complete list of items to include in your emergency kit and other [emergency preparedness information](#), visit www.getprepared.ca

Steps you can take to keep your food safe in an emergency

Practicing safe food-handling is an important part of everyday life, but is especially important in emergency situations.

Be sure to carefully inspect all food items and do not eat any food you think may not be safe. Spoiled food may not look contaminated. Remember, **when in doubt, throw it out.**

Plan ahead for emergencies

Check the temperature of your fridge and freezer. Are they cold enough?

- Set refrigerators at or below 4°C (40°F). Use a refrigerator thermometer to check the temperature.
- Keep freezers at or below -18°C (0°F). Use a freezer thermometer to check the temperature.
- If there is a power outage, refrigerator and freezer thermometers will indicate the internal temperature of the appliances to help you determine if the stored food is safe.

Have a cooler with ice ready ahead of time to keep refrigerated food cold if you know that the power will be out for more than 4 hours.

Have items on hand that do not require refrigeration, such as shelf-stable foods, including canned goods and water. Remember to replace these emergency storage food items periodically.

Make sure to have ready-to-use baby formula and pet food, if needed.

Ensure that you have a hand-held can opener to use during an emergency.

Handling refrigerated and frozen food during a power failure

Freezing stops the growth of bacteria. Do not open the refrigerator or freezer door unless absolutely necessary in order to maintain the cold temperature.

- A full freezer will keep food frozen for about 48 hours. A freezer that is half full will keep food frozen for about 24 hours.
- An unopened refrigerator will keep food cold for about 4 hours.
- If available, add ice to the refrigerator to keep the food at a safe temperature if the power will be out for long periods of time.

Do not place frozen food outside, even in winter. The sun's rays could thaw frozen food even when the outdoor temperature is very cold, and animals could contaminate your food.

If you know that a power failure will last for a long period of time, see if you can take the food to a friend nearby who has power.

Handling refrigerated and frozen food after a power failure

Discard any thawed food that has been at room temperature for two or more hours, and any food that has an obvious unusual colour or odour. Keep in mind that food contaminated with bacteria does not necessarily smell bad or appear spoiled.

Food that still contains ice crystals or feels refrigerator-cold can be re-frozen.

If raw food has leaked during thawing, clean and disinfect the areas the food has touched. Do not reuse the cloths you have used for clean-up until they have been disinfected by washing in hot water.

Safe handling of food and water

Listen to local authorities to determine if tap water is safe to use. If the water is not safe to use, follow instructions to use bottled water, or to boil or disinfect water for cooking, cleaning, and bathing.

Do not use contaminated water to:

- brush your teeth
- make baby formula
- make ice
- wash and prepare food
- wash dishes
- wash your hands

Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with

- animal waste
- chemicals
- extraneous materials
- floodwater
- snow and ice
- soil and dirt

If buying food at the grocery store, or eating out, ask retailers and restaurateurs to explain how food has been kept safe during a power failure.

Check the condition of stored food and throw away any containers that have been damaged or are past their “best before” date. Can or container damage is shown by:

- crushing/denting that prevents normal stacking or opening
- deep rusting
- holes
- leakage
- punctures
- swelling

Food containers that are **not** waterproof and could have come into contact with floodwater should be thrown away. These include containers with:

- pull tops
- screw-caps
- snap lids

If the following items have come into contact with floodwater or hazardous material, they should be thrown away because they cannot be sanitized properly.

- baby formula containers
- cardboard juice containers
- home-canned foods
- milk containers

Cleaning and drying stored food and food surfaces after a flood

Only undamaged, commercially-prepared foods in sealed, unopened, airtight, waterproof cans, jars or pouches are entirely safe to use. However, these cans and/or pouches must be carefully inspected, cleaned and disinfected before use by following these procedures:

1. If possible, remove the labels on cans or pouches since they could have come into contact with dirt or bacteria. Be sure to re-label your cans or pouches, including the “best before” date, with a permanent marker.
2. After labels are removed, cans can be cleaned by washing them for two minutes with a mild bleach solution - 5 ml (or 1 tsp) of bleach per 750 ml (or 3 cups) of water.
3. Air-dry all cleaned food cans, jars and pouches to prevent potential contamination when the containers are opened.

Food preparation equipment, surfaces, dishes and utensils should be properly sanitized with a mild bleach solution. It is important to allow equipment, surfaces, dishes and utensils to air dry thoroughly before storing. Do not put one wet cutting board on top of another, because bacteria can multiply in trapped water.

By taking steps before, during, and after an emergency, you can help protect yourself and your family from food-borne illnesses.

If you require more information on this procedure, please contact a Public Health Inspector at one of the following locations.

CAMROSE

5510 - 46 Avenue
Camrose T4V 4P8
Phone: (780) 679-2980
Fax: (780) 679-2999

DRAYTON VALLEY

Box 6300, 4110 - 50 Avenue
Drayton Valley T7A 0B3
Phone: 780-542-5321
Fax: (780) 621-4998

DRUMHELLER

607 - 7 Street E
Drumheller T0J 0Y5
Phone: (403) 823-3341
Fax: (403) 823-6657

HANNA

Box 730, 904 Centre Street N
Hanna T0J 1P0
Phone: (403) 854-3331
Fax: (403) 854-4850

LAMONT

Box 1109, 5216 - 53 Street
Lamont T0B 2R0
Phone: 780-895-5817
Fax: (780) 895-2200

OLDS

103, 5030 - 50 Street
Olds T4H 1S1
Phone: (403) 553 8441
Fax: (780) 556-6842

PONOKA

5900 Hwy 2A
Ponoka T4J 1P5
Phone: (403) 783-4491
Fax: (403) 782-3825

RED DEER

300 Johnstone Crossing
Red Deer T4P 0G8
Phone: 403-356-6366
Fax: 403-356-6433

ROCKY MOUNTAIN HOUSE

Box 340, 5016 - 52 Avenue
Rocky Mtn House T0M 1T0
Phone: (403) 845-3030
Fax: (403) 845-4975

SEDGEWICK

Box 12, 4822 - 50 Street
Sedgewick T0B 4C0
Phone: 780-384-3652
Fax: (780) 384-3699

STETTLER

Box 550, 5911- 50 Avenue
Stettler T0C 2L0
Phone: (403) 742-3326
Fax: (403) 742-1353

SYLVAN LAKE

4602 - 49 Avenue
Sylvan Lake T4S 1M7
Phone: (403) 887-2241
Fax: (403) 887-2610

TOFIELD

Box 1200, 5543 - 44 Street
Tofield T0B 4J0
Phone: (780) 662-3984
Fax: (780) 662-3355

VERMILION

11, 4701 - 52 Street
Vermilion T9X 1J9
Phone: (780) 853-5270
Fax: (780) 853-7362

WAINWRIGHT

22, 810 - 14 Avenue
Wainwright T9W 1R2
Phone: (780) 842-4077
Fax: (780) 842-3151

WETASKIWIN

5610 - 40 Avenue
Wetaskiwin T9A 3E2
Phone: (780) 361-4333
Fax: (780) 361-4335