

What to do with food and medicines after a flood

After a flood, be cautious about handling food and medications that have been exposed to flood or unsafe water. They may be contaminated with toxins and germs that can cause illnesses.

If your garden was flooded with water from a stream or river, do not attempt to harvest any items from a garden flooded. This includes tomatoes and peppers as well as potatoes and carrots. Flood waters can bring with them harmful microorganisms, chemicals and other contaminants that can make food unsafe. Some of these contaminants may not be removed or destroyed with peeling or cooking.

If flood waters covered food stored on shelves and in cabinets many of the food can be unsafe. Here is a list of what to keep and what to discard.

- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water, this would include raw fruits and vegetables, cartons of milk or eggs.
- Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water. Food containers that are not water proof include those packaged in plastic wrap or cardboard, or those with screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops and crimped caps. Flood waters can enter into any of these containers and contaminate the food inside. Also discard cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes and home canned foods if they have come in contact with flood water, because they cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized.
- Inspect canned foods and discard any food in damaged cans. Can damage is shown by swelling, leakage, punctures, holes, fractures, extensive deep rusting, or crushing/denting severe enough to prevent normal stacking or opening with a manual, wheel-type can opener.

Undamaged, commercially prepared foods in all-metal cans and retort pouches (such as, flexible, shelf-stable juice or seafood pouches) can be saved if you do the following.

- Remove the labels, if they are the removable kind, since they can harbor dirt and bacteria.
- Thoroughly wash the cans and pouches with soap and water, using hot water if it is available.
- Brush or wipe away any dirt or silt.
- Rinse the cans or retort pouches with water that is safe for drinking, if available, since dirt or residual soap will reduce the effectiveness of chlorine sanitation.
- Then, sanitize them by immersion in one of the following ways.
 - Place in water and allow the water to come to a boil and continue boiling for 2 minutes, or
 - Place in a freshly made solution consisting of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water for 15 minutes.
- Air-dry cans or pouches for a minimum of 1 hour before opening or storing.
- If the labels were removed, then re-label your cans or pouches, including the expiration date if available with a marker.
- Food in reconditioned cans or retort pouches should be used as soon as possible, thereafter.

- Any concentrated baby formula in reconditioned, all-metal containers must be diluted with clean, drinking water.

Any medications including pills, liquids, drugs for injection, inhalers or skin medication that have come in contact with flood or contaminated water should be discarded. The exception to this is drugs that are lifesaving and not easily replaced. Contact your doctor or pharmacist immediately about getting your medication replaced.

In that case, if the container is contaminated but the contents appear unaffected, for example, the pills are dry, the pills may be used until a replacement can be obtained. However, if the pill is wet, or is discolored, it should be considered contaminated and be discarded.

If electricity to your home is out foods and medications stored in the refrigerator may be spoiled. A general rule, an unopened refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours. If the outage is longer or you are not sure when the power went out, then you need to discard the contents.

Sources: Keeping Food Safe During an Emergency. FSIS, and texashelp.tamu.edu, Mayo Clinic.