

What You Need to Know When the Power Goes Out Unexpectedly about Food Safety

CDC offers these tips to help you prepare for and cope with sudden loss of power.

Food Safety

If the power is out for less than 4 hours, then the food in your refrigerator and freezer will be safe to consume. While the power is out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to keep food cold for longer.

If the power is out for longer than 4 hours, follow the guidelines below:

- For the Freezer section: A freezer that is half full will hold food safely for up to 24 hours. A full freezer will hold food safely for 48 hours. Do not open the freezer door if you can avoid it.
- For the Refrigerated section: Pack milk, other dairy products, meat, fish, eggs, gravy, and spoilable leftovers into a cooler surrounded by ice. Inexpensive Styrofoam coolers are fine for this purpose.
- Use a food thermometer to check the temperature of your food right before you cook or eat it. Throw away any food that has a temperature of more than 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

For guidelines on refreezing food when the power comes back on, visit the Food Safety and Inspection Service's page on [Food Safety in an Emergency](#).

The following resources provide additional information on preparing for emergencies and determining if your food is safe after a power outage:

- [Food Safety After a Power Outage, American Red Cross](#)
Provides tips on safely storing your food and a chart to help you determine if your food is still safe.
- [Keeping Food Safe in an Emergency, United States Department of Agriculture](#)
Fact sheet and FAQs on food and water safety including guidance on when to discard perishable foods.
- [Being Prepared, American Red Cross](#)
Comprehensive site on preparing for emergencies including power outages.
- [Food Safety Office, CDC](#)
Comprehensive food safety information.
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Safe Drinking Water

When power goes out, water purification systems may not be functioning fully. Safe water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene includes bottled, boiled, or treated water. Your state, local, or tribal health department can make specific recommendations for boiling or treating water in your area. Here are some general rules



concerning water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene. Remember:

- Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula. If possible, use baby formula that does not need to have water added.
- If you use bottled water, be sure it came from a safe source. If you do not know that the water came from a safe source, you should boil or treat it before you use it. Use only bottled, boiled, or treated water until your supply is tested and found safe.
- Boiling water, when practical, is the preferred way to kill harmful bacteria and parasites. Bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute will kill most organisms.
- If you don't have clean, safe, bottled water and if boiling is not possible, you often can make water safer to drink by using a disinfectant, such as unscented household chlorine bleach, iodine, or chlorine dioxide tablets. These can kill most harmful organisms, such as viruses and bacteria. However, only chlorine dioxide tablets are effective in controlling more resistant organisms, such as the parasite *Cryptosporidium*.

To disinfect water:

- Filter it through a clean cloth, paper towel, or coffee filter OR allow it to settle.
- Draw off the clear water.
 - When using household chlorine bleach:
 - Add 1/8 teaspoon (or 8 drops; about 0.625 milliliters) of unscented liquid household chlorine (5–6%) bleach **for each gallon of clear water** (or 2 drops of bleach for each liter or each quart of clear water). Add 1/4 teaspoon (or 16 drops; about 1.50 milliliters) of bleach **for each gallon of cloudy water** (or 4 drops of bleach for each liter or each quart of cloudy water).
 - Stir the mixture well.
 - Let it stand for 30 minutes or longer before you use it.
 - Store the disinfected water in clean, disinfected containers with tight covers.
 - When using iodine:
 - Follow the manufacturer's instructions.
 - Store the disinfected water in clean, disinfected containers with tight covers.
 - When using chlorine dioxide tablets:
 - Follow the manufacturer's instructions.
 - Store the disinfected water in clean, disinfected containers with tight covers.

Content source: [National Center for Environmental Health \(NCEH\)/Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry \(ATSDR\)](#), [National Center for Injury Prevention and Control \(NCIPC\)](#)

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