



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH INFORMATIONAL BULLETIN

FOOD SAFETY RELATED TO POWER OUTAGES

In the event of a power outage in Orange County, the Health Care Agency, Environmental Health Division offers the following food safety tips to prevent foodborne illness:

- **Keep Refrigerator and freezer doors closed.** Keep potentially hazardous foods, such as meat or poultry, chilled to 41°F or less.
- **Do not place hot or unrefrigerated foods in the refrigerator once the power has gone out.** It will raise the temperature inside the unit. Chill food with ice baths as needed. Any foods that were prepared prior to the power outage that were not rapidly cooled should be discarded.
- If the freezer is not full, group packages together so they will retain the cold more effectively. Without power, a full freezer will keep everything frozen for about 2 days. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen 1 day.
- If you have advance warning of a power outage and if the outage is anticipated to last more than 4 hours, move foods that must be refrigerated to the freezer as space will allow.
- If necessary use block ice, bagged ice or dry ice for supplemental cooling. Be especially careful when handling dry ice and do not touch it directly with bare skin or inhale the fumes directly.
- Keep meat and poultry items separated from other foods so if they begin to thaw, their juices will not drip on to other foods.
- Discard any thawed food that has risen to room temperature and remained there for two (2) hours or more.
- Some facilities may need to arrange for temporary refrigerated storage units during a prolonged power outage, (e.g., mobile units/trailers).
- **Kitchen ventilation units will shut off during power outages. Be advised that there have been reports of smoke, heat and grease emissions setting off alarm and fire suppression systems.**

Which foods should I be concerned about?

All foods, which are potentially hazardous, are the most important. These are all meats, fish, poultry, all dairy products, all eggs and egg products, soft cheeses, cooked beans, cooked rice, cooked potatoes, cooked pasta, macaroni salads, custards, etc.

Some foods are not going to cause illness (be hazardous) but the quality may be affected. These foods include mayonnaise, butter and margarine, produce, hard cheeses, etc.

Some foods are safe. These are carbonated beverages, unopened bottled juices, ketchup, mustard, relishes, jams, peanut butter, barbeque sauce, etc.

When in doubt, throw it out!

When the power comes back on all potentially hazardous foods must be evaluated for proper temperatures. Bacteria can multiply rapidly on potentially hazardous foods that have been at room temperature for more than 2 hours. Potentially hazardous foods should be discarded if the temperature has exceeded 41 degrees Fahrenheit. Thawed food that are at 41 degrees Fahrenheit or below should be used as soon as possible. Do not refreeze thawed foods. Cook foods to proper temperatures to ensure food safety. Refrigerated foods should be safe as long as the power in not out more than a few hours and the doors have been kept closed.

Cooking Temperatures

FOOD	MINIMUM INTERNAL COOKING TEMPERATURE
Ground meats	157 degrees Fahrenheit
Pork	145 degrees Fahrenheit
Poultry and stuffed meats	165 degrees Fahrenheit
Eggs	145 degrees Fahrenheit

How do I know if the food is unsafe to eat?

You can't rely on appearance or odor. Never taste the food to determine its safety. Some foods may look and smell fine, but if they have been warm for too long, bacteria associated with foodborne illness may be present that can make you sick. If possible, use a thermometer to check the temperature food temperature. If potentially hazardous foods are at 41 degrees Fahrenheit or less, and have not otherwise been contaminated, then they should be safe.

What happens when the power goes back on?

Allow time for refrigerators to reach the proper temperature of less than 41 degrees Fahrenheit before restocking.

Sources: County of San Diego, Department of Environmental Health
Seattle-King County, Department of Public Health, State of Washington