

Keeping Food and Water Safe during Floods and Emergencies
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Nebraska has just recently experienced catastrophic and unpredictable weather that may affect food and water safety in your home. Follow these steps to keep your FOOD SAFE during and after flood conditions.

1. Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water.
2. Discard any food and beverage 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 waterproof include undamaged, commercially prepared foods in all-metal cans and “retort pouches” (like flexible, shelf-stable juice or seafood pouches).
 - Food containers that are not waterproof include those with screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops, and crimped caps.
 - 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.
3. Discard any food in damaged cans. Damaged cans are those with swelling, leakage, punctures, holes, fractures, extensive deep rusting, or crushing/denting that is severe enough to prevent normal stacking or opening with a manual, wheel-type can opener. See box on next page for steps to clean/save undamaged packages.
4. Thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes, and utensils (including can openers) with soap and water, using hot water if available. Rinse and then sanitize them by boiling in clean water or immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented household (5.25% concentration) liquid bleach per gallon of water.
5. Thoroughly wash countertops with soap and water, using hot water if available. Rinse and then sanitize by applying a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented household (5.25% concentration) liquid bleach per gallon of water. Allow to air dry.

How To Save Undamaged Food Packages Exposed to Flood Water

1. Undamaged, commercially prepared foods in all-metal cans and “retort pouches” (like flexible, shelf-stable juice or seafood pouches) can be saved if you follow this procedure.
2. Remove the labels, if they are the removable kind, since they can harbor dirt and bacteria.
3. Brush or wipe away any dirt or silt.
4. Thoroughly wash the cans or retort pouches with soap and water, using hot water if it is available.
5. 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.
6. Sanitize cans and retort pouches by immersion in one of the two following ways:
 - Place in water and allow the water to come to a boil and continue boiling for 2 minutes.
 - Place in a solution of 1 cup (8 oz/250 mL) of unscented household (5.25% concentration) bleach mixed with 5 gallons of water and soak for 15 minutes.
7. Air dry cans or retort pouches for a minimum of 1 hour before opening or storing.
8. If the labels were removable, then re-label your cans or retort pouches, including the expiration date, with a permanent marking pen.
9. Food in reconditioned cans or retort pouches should be used as soon as possible thereafter.

Baby Formula Tip

For infants, try to use prepared, canned baby formula that requires no added water. Otherwise, dilute any concentrated baby formula in reconditioned, all-metal containers with clean drinking water.

IF FLOODING OCCURS

Keep Water Safe

Follow these steps to keep your **WATER SAFE during and after flood conditions**.

1. Only use **water from a safe source** for drinking and washing or preparing food.
2. Use **bottled water** that has not been exposed to flood waters, if it is available.
3. If you don't have bottled water, you should **boil or disinfect water** to make it safe. (see steps below)
4. If you have a **well** that has been flooded, the water should be **tested and disinfected** after flood waters recede. If you suspect that your well may be contaminated, contact your local or state health department or agricultural extension agent for specific advice.

How to Boil or Disinfect Water To Make It Safe

If the water is cloudy, first filter it through clean cloths, or allow it to settle and then draw off the clear water for boiling/ disinfecting. Then, follow one of these two procedures:

Boiling

Boiling water will kill most types of disease-causing organisms that may be present.

1. Boil the water for 1 minute.
2. Let it cool, and store it in clean containers with covers.

Disinfecting with Bleach

Bleach will kill some, but not all, types of disease-causing organisms that may be in the water.

- Add 1/8 teaspoon (or 8 drops) of unscented household (5.25% concentration) liquid bleach for each gallon of water.
- Stir it well and let it stand for 30 minutes before you use it.
- Store disinfected water in clean containers with covers.

Source:

<https://www.fda.gov/food/recallsoutbreaksemergencies/emergencies/ucm076881.htm>

Questions about food safety? Please email Amy Peterson at amy.peterson@unl.edu or call the Polk County Extension at 402-747-2321

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