

Fact Sheet

March 2009

Power failure and food safety

During and after a prolonged power failure, the foods you keep in the refrigerator and freezer may become unsafe to eat. Bacteria can build up in perishable foods which may cause foodborne illness. The most common symptoms of foodborne illness may include stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and fever. While the power is out, keep the freezer and refrigerator doors closed—avoid opening and closing the doors to check the food inside. Food will keep for 24 to 48 hours in the freezer and for 12 to 24 hours in the fridge.

If your power has been out for 24 hours, all food in your refrigerator must be disposed of; after 48 hours, all food in both your refrigerator and freezer must be thrown out and the appliance cleaned and sanitized.

Here is some advice to help in making sure your food is stored safely if the power goes out:

Your freezer

- Without electrical power, a full upright or chest freezer will keep food frozen for about 2 days.
- A half-full freezer will keep food frozen for 1 day.
- Ice could help to keep the freezer remain cold.
- Throw out any thawed food that has been sitting at room temperature for more than 2 hours.
- Partial thawing and refreezing may reduce the quality of some food, but it will remain safe to eat.

Your refrigerator-freezer combination

- Without electrical power, the refrigerator section will keep food cool for 4-6 hours. Ice could help to keep refrigerator cool.
- Throw out any food with a strange colour or odour as soon as possible.
- Make sure raw meat, poultry or fish are wrapped very well and placed in the coldest section of your refrigerator.

Your medication

- If you need information on proper storage of your prescription drugs that require refrigeration, such as insulin, call your doctor or local pharmacist.

When to throw food out

- Any food item with a strange colour or odour – **if in doubt, throw it out.**
- Throw out these foods if the electrical power has been off for more than 4 hours:
 - Raw or cooked meat, poultry and seafood
 - Milk, cream, yogurt, soft and semi-soft cheese
 - Cooked pasta, rice, and potatoes
 - Custard, pudding, chiffon, and cheese pies
 - Casseroles, soups, and stews
 - Refrigerated cookie dough
 - Cream-filled pastries
 - Salads (vegetable, pasta, potato, etc.)
 - Fresh eggs, egg substitutes

For more information:

Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care

<http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/foodsafety/homefood.html>