

Refrigerated and Frozen Food

After a hurricane, electrical power may be out for several days. Refrigerated and frozen foods may spoil after a few days without power but there are some steps that you can take to help keep your food longer.

Prior to a storm, turn your refrigerator and freezer to the coldest setting. If possible, remove foods from your refrigerator that you plan to use during and immediately after the storm and place them in an ice chest filled with ice. Freeze plastic containers of water and place in your freezer and refrigerator, then do not open the doors unless absolutely necessary. This will help maintain food-preserving temperatures for a longer period. You can also use dry ice in your freezer. It is also a good idea to cover the freezer with quilts or blankets, making sure that you do not obstruct any air ventilation openings.

Foods in the Freezer

Thawing rate:

With the door closed, food in most freezers will stay frozen 1 to 3 days, even in the summer. The thawing rate depends on:

- The amount of food in the freezer. A full freezer will stay cold longer.
- The kind of food in the freezer. A freezer full of meat will stay cold longer than a freezer full of baked goods.
- The temperature of the food. The colder the food, the longer it will stay frozen.
- The quality of the freezer. A well insulated freezer will keep food frozen longer than one with little insulation.
- Size of the freezer. The larger the freezer, the longer food will stay frozen.

Thawing and Refreezing:

- Foods that have been frozen and thawed require the same care as foods that have never been frozen. You can safely refreeze foods if they still contain ice crystals. If thawed less than 2 days, you may refreeze food that has been kept cold (about 40 degrees). Use refrozen food as soon as possible.
- Partial thawing and refreezing does reduce the quality of foods, particularly fruits, vegetables and prepared foods. Red meats are affected less than many other foods by partial thawing and refreezing.
- Thawed fruits can be refrozen if they still taste and smell good. Fruits usually ferment when they start to spoil.

- Completely thawed meats and poultry should not be refrozen. Care should be taken in determining whether or not thawed meat and poultry should be refrozen. Meats and poultry become unsafe to eat when they start to spoil. Therefore, each package should be examined before determining whether or not it should be refrozen. If the color or odor of the thawed food is poor or questionable, dispose of it, as it may be dangerous to eat.
- Do not use melted ice cream.

Foods in the Refrigerator

- Meat will keep much longer if it is thoroughly cooled as soon as it is taken out of the refrigerator. You can extend your food supply by cooking all unspoiled meat immediately, and refrigerating it until you are ready to reheat and serve it.

Meats least apt to spoil quickly are large, solid, unboned pieces of fresh beef or lamb, such as rump roast or leg of lamb.

Chopped meats, like hamburger, spoil quickly. Pork, fish and poultry also spoil quickly. Throw them out if they have been out of refrigeration for several hours or more. Do not trust your sense of smell with these foods.

Cured meats, such as ham or bacon, will be safe to eat, even after several days without refrigeration.

- Eggs can be kept several days in a cool place without refrigeration, if the shell is not cracked.
- Hard cheese will usually keep well at room temperatures. Other cheeses, such as cream cheese, opened containers of cheese spread, and cottage cheese, spoil quickly.
- Milk spoils quickly without refrigeration. Do not use any milk with a sour smell or taste.
- Custards, creamed foods, or any foods containing mayonnaise, spoil quickly. These foods are likely growing places for organisms causing food poisoning. Throw out any of these foods if they reach room temperature. Spoilage often cannot be detected since there may not be a bad odor or taste.