

FLOODS: CONTAMINATED FOOD

FACT SHEET

Food contamination is often a problem after a flood because flood water can carry mud, raw sewage, chemicals, and fuel. Disease-causing bacteria can contaminate any food the flood water comes in contact with and made that food unsafe to eat. The following guidance will help you salvage food after a flood. Remember: "If in doubt, throw it out!"

Most metal cans can be salvaged; be sure to examine them carefully. Metal cans of food that are free of dents and rust can be saved if these steps are followed:

- Remove all labels and re-label with a permanent marker
- Wash the unopened cans in a strong dish detergent solution
- Use a brush to remove all silt and dirt, especially around the rims
- Immerse scrubbed containers in a lukewarm solution of one cup of bleach in five gallons of clean water
- Allow the cans to thoroughly air dry before opening or storing

Fresh foods should ALWAYS be discarded. All fresh vegetables and fruits and fresh meats, fish, and poultry that have been in contact with flood waters must be discarded.

Use only pre-prepared baby formula that requires no added water. If using formula that requires water, use only bottled or pre-treated water.

Discard damaged foods. Discard the following foods if flood water has covered, dripped on, or seeped into the package.

- Discard any cans with rust, dents, or bulging
- Canisters or bags (e.g. bags of grains, flour, sugar, canisters of salt, coffee, and tea)
- Food in paper, plastic, cloth, fiber, or cardboard packages even if the packages seem dry (e.g. pasta, cereal, crackers, baking mixes, juice boxes)
- Jars or bottles of food that have screw-top or crimp-topped lids (soda bottles), snap-lids, twist caps, pull tops, and home canned foods

Discard porous non-food items that come into contact with foods. Any porous items that are used with food or come in contact with the mouth should be discarded. This includes:

- Plastic baby bottles, nipples, and pacifiers
- Plastic storage containers
- Wooden bowls
- Disposable silverware
- Plastic utensils
- Paper, foam, or plastic dishes

Refrigerated or frozen foods. Discard food in your refrigerator or frozen food if:

- Frozen food is thawed and the temperature is above 45° for over 3 hours
- The refrigerated food temperatures are above 45° for more than 3 hours
- Power has been down for more than six hours

Food that contains ice crystals and is cold as if refrigerated may be re-frozen and salvaged.

For more information, contact CCHD's Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program at 452-0881 x310 or visit www.cchdmt.org or www.cdc.gov.