

# Food safety in an emergency

Following an emergency such as a flood, storm or cyclone, there is a danger that some food in your house may not be safe to eat, especially if power has been cut or if food has been in contact with contaminated floodwater.

After an emergency, it is recommended that you dispose of:

- food that has been in contact with floodwater
- food that has an unusual odour, colour or texture
- refrigerated food that has been left unrefrigerated or above 5°C for more than four hours
- frozen food after 48 hours (if the freezer is full) or after 24 hours (if the freezer is only half full). If frozen food has partially thawed, the food should be eaten as soon as possible
- canned food where the can is open, swollen or damaged, or has a missing or damaged label
- food containers with screw or twist caps, snap-lids, crimped caps (soft drink bottles) and flip tops.

Commercially canned foods that are sealed, not bulging or dented, may be safe. It is recommended that you:

- remove the label since it could harbour dirt and bacteria
- thoroughly wash the outside of the can with drinking quality water—hot, if possible
- sanitise the can by dipping it in a solution of 1.5 cups of household chlorine bleach in 10 litres of warm water for two minutes and then rinsing it in drinking quality water
- re-label the can with a waterproof marker pen, including the expiry date. Use the product as soon as possible.



## If in doubt, throw it out!

If your vegetable garden has been in contact with floodwater, the food may be contaminated and unsafe to eat. Contaminants may persist in the soil after flooding. Depending on the type of contamination, it may take at least a month before your home garden is suitable for replanting and/or harvesting of any produce.

## Cleaning and sanitising

If benches, food utensils and kitchen equipment have been in contact with floodwater:

- throw away damaged or cracked items, and items made from porous material such as wood, plastic or rubber (including wooden chopping boards)— these items cannot be adequately sanitised
- wash utensils and surfaces in hot, soapy, drinking quality water
- take apart and clean the non-electrical pieces of kitchen equipment and rinse in clean, hot water
- sanitise silverware, metal utensils, pots, pans and kitchen equipment in pieces by placing them in boiling water for at least three minutes
- dishes and utensils that cannot be safely placed in boiling water (certain glassware, porcelain, china and enamelware) should be sanitised by immersing it in a disinfecting solution of 1 tablespoon of chlorine bleach per 2 litres of warm water, then rinsed with drinking quality water
- clean cupboards and counters with hot soapy water, then rinse with a chlorine bleach solution of 1 tablespoon of chlorine bleach per 2 litres of warm water. Rinse thoroughly with drinking quality water
- don't use tea towels that might have been splashed with contaminated water.

## Water for drinking

In an emergency, tap water and private water supplies from tanks, wells and bores may become unsafe to drink, use for cooking and cleaning.

Listen to the radio for public announcements about the safety of your water supply, or check with your local council or water utility. Private water supplies should be tested before use.

To ensure your water is safe:

- use only bottled or boiled or treated water for drinking, cooking or preparing food, washing utensils and surfaces, brushing teeth, hand washing, making ice and bathing
- filter cloudy water through a clean cloth or allow it to settle and then pour off the clear water for boiling. Boil the water then leave it to cool. Store it in a clean, covered container. Boiling will ensure water is safe from most types of harmful bugs, but will not remove chemical contaminants
- thoroughly clean any containers used to store water with hot, soapy drinking quality water, then rinse with a bleach solution of 1 tablespoon of bleach per 2 litres of warm water. Rinse thoroughly with drinking quality water before use.

## After a power failure

It is useful to make a note of the time the power failed.

Keep cold food cold:

Keep the refrigerator door closed as much as possible while the power is off. A closed refrigerator should keep food cold for four hours.

Freezers will usually not defrost and spoil food for at least 24 hours, provided the door has been kept shut. If frozen foods have thawed, they should not be refrozen but should be kept cold and eaten as soon as possible.

If you have access to ice, pack your refrigerator and freezer to help maintain a cool temperature.

Keep hot food hot:

Throw out food that was being cooked when the power failed, if the cooking cannot be completed within two hours. If food is already properly cooked, eat it within two hours or throw it out.



## Further information:

More information about food safety is available at: [www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety)

For further information to help you before, during and after a natural disaster:

- view Queensland Health's fact sheets at [www.health.qld.gov.au/healthieryou/disaster](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/healthieryou/disaster)
- visit Emergency Management Queensland at [www.emergency.qld.gov.au/emq/css/beprepared.asp](http://www.emergency.qld.gov.au/emq/css/beprepared.asp)
- contact your nearest Queensland Health public health unit.

## For further information, contact your nearest Queensland Health public health unit:

Brisbane North      Tel: 3624 1111  
Brisbane South     Tel: 3000 9148  
Bundaberg           Tel: 4150 2780  
Cairns                Tel: 4226 5555  
Central Queensland Tel: 4920 6989  
Central West        Tel: 4652 6000

Darling Downs     Tel: 4631 9888  
Gold Coast          Tel: 5668 3700  
Hervey Bay         Tel: 4184 1800  
Logan                Tel: 3412 2989  
Mackay              Tel: 4911 0400  
Moreton Bay        Tel: 3142 1800

Mount Isa and Gulf Tel: 4744 9100  
South West         Tel: 4656 8100  
Sunshine Coast    Tel: 5409 6600  
Townsville         Tel: 4753 9000  
West Moreton      Tel: 3413 1200