



# Food Safety After a Flood

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## **Food Safety**

You must inspect food that has come anywhere near flood water very carefully. Even the slightest contact with flood water can lead to contamination. There is a simple, basic rule: all foods that have touched flood water should be thrown away, with only one exception. Food in sealed, air tight, metal cans is entirely safe for use, as long as you carefully clean and disinfect the cans before opening. That means removing labels, washing cans with a scrub brush in a strong detergent solution, soaking them in a bleach solution for two minutes, then rinsing in clear water. Another method is to boil the cans for ten minutes. That's long enough to kill harmful bacteria while preserving the can and its contents.

## **Cookware and Utensils**

If your cookware and kitchen utensils have come into contact with flood water, they'll require special treatment. Wash all china and glass dishes and cups and pots and pans that have been covered with flood waters with hot soapy water and use a brush to remove dirt. Any piece of equipment that can be taken apart should be cleaned in pieces. Dip in a sanitizing bleach solution and rinse in clean water. The bleach solution should be one half-cup of bleach to one gallon of water. Throw away dishes with deep cracks as well as all plastic and wooden utensils, plates, bowls and cookware. They cannot be disinfected. Toss out plastic baby bottles, nipples and plastic food containers. Also throw away any food, medicine or toiletry item that has come into contact with flood water.

## **Water Quality**

Before you quench your thirst, make sure your water is safe. Boil all rain and tap water and water from containers you're not sure about. If you have a well, have the water tested before you resume use. Your local health department can help you here. Avoid contact with flood water. You could find yourself wading into harmful contaminants and debris. Always wash after contact with flood water. If you have questions about water quality, contact your local health department or county extension agent.

## **Sewage & Garbage**

If storms have left you without running water, dealing with garbage and sewage can be a tricky chore. Until your toilets are working, use a portable one. If one is not available, bury waste on high ground, away from any well. Beware that sewage can backflow through floor drains into basements. Should this happen, disinfect with a solution of one-half cup of bleach to a gallon of water. And remember, never mix ammonia and chlorine bleach. That produces poisonous chlorine gas. After coming into contact with sewage or flood water, wash your hands well, especially before you eat or drink. Take the garbage out at least every four days and store it in a rigid container to keep animals and insects out.