

# News Release

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PLEASE RELEASE IMMEDIATELY:

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June 12, 2008

## **FOOD SAFETY AFTER A FLOOD**

**If flood waters covered food stored on shelves, in cabinets, or root cellars, what should you keep and what should you throw out?** Many food items are unsafe once they come in contact with flood water. Here is a guide of what to keep and what to discard:

- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water – this would include raw fruits and vegetables, cartons of milk or eggs.
- Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water. Food containers that are not waterproof include those packaged in plastic wrap or cardboard, or those with screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops, and crimped caps. Flood waters can enter into any of these containers and contaminate the food inside.
- Also, discard cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes and home canned foods if they have come in contact with flood water, because they cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized. With home canned foods, the

contamination may be under the sealing ring or so close to the lid that these can't be effectively cleaned.

- Inspect canned foods and discard any food in damaged cans. Can damage is shown by swelling, leakage, punctures, holes, fractures, extensive deep rusting, or crushing/denting severe enough to prevent normal stacking or opening with a manual, wheel-type can opener.

**How do I salvage canned items?** Undamaged, commercially prepared foods in all-metal cans and retort pouches (for example, flexible, shelf-stable juice or seafood pouches) can be saved if you do the following:

- Remove the labels, if they are the removable kind, since they can harbor dirt and bacteria.
- Thoroughly wash the cans or retort pouches with soap and water, using hot water if it is available.
- Brush or wipe away any dirt or silt.
- Rinse the cans or retort pouches with water that is safe for drinking, if available, since dirt or residual soap will reduce the effectiveness of chlorine sanitation.
- Then, sanitize them by immersion in one of the two following ways:
- Place in water and allow the water to come to a boil and continue boiling for 2 minutes, or
- Place in a freshly made solution consisting of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water (or the cleanest, clearest water available) for 15 minutes.
- Air-dry cans or retort pouches for a minimum of 1 hour before opening or storing.
- If the labels were removable, then re-label your cans or retort pouches, including the expiration date (if available), with a marker.
- Food in reconditioned cans or retort pouches should be used as soon as possible, thereafter.
- Any concentrated baby formula in reconditioned, all-metal containers must be diluted with clean, drinking water

**How should I clean my pots, pans, dishes, and utensils?** Thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes, and utensils (including can openers) with soap and water, using hot water if available. Rinse and then sanitize them by boiling in clean water or immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water (or the cleanest, clearest water available).

**How should I clean my countertops?** Thoroughly wash countertops with soap and water, using hot water if available. Rinse and then sanitize them by applying a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water (or the cleanest, clearest water available). Allow to air-dry.

**My home was flooded and I am worried about the safety of the drinking water. What should I do?** Use **bottled water** that has not been exposed to flood waters if it is available.

- If you don't have bottled water, you should **boil water** to make sure it is safe. Boiling water will kill most types of disease-causing organisms that may be present. If the water is cloudy, filter it through clean cloths or allow it to settle, and draw off the clear water for boiling. Boil the water for **one minute**, let it cool, and store it in clean containers with covers.
- If you can't boil water, you can **disinfect it using household bleach**. Bleach will kill some, but not all, types of disease-causing organisms that may be in the water. If the water is cloudy, filter it through clean cloths or allow it to settle, and draw off the clear water for disinfection. Add **1/8 teaspoon (or 8 drops)** of regular, unscented, liquid household bleach **for each gallon of water**, stir it well and let it stand for 30 minutes before you use it. Store disinfected water in clean containers with covers.
- If you have a well that had been flooded, the water should be tested and disinfected after flood waters recede. If you suspect that your well may be contaminated, contact your county or state health department.

**My garden was flooded. Are my fruits and vegetables safe to eat?**

Some garden produce may be salvaged, depending on the type of flooding and the type of produce.

- If the floodwater contained waste from septic tanks, sewage lagoons, or pastures, your garden will take about a month to become clean. Don't eat or preserve food during this time.
- Discard all leafy greens, such as lettuce, spinach, or cabbage, as well as soft berries. They're highly prone to bacterial contamination and are difficult to thoroughly clean.
- Wash beans, tomatoes, peppers, summer squash, and underground vegetables, such as carrots and potatoes, in water. Then soak in a weak solution of 2 tablespoons chlorine bleach to a gallon of water. Peel and cook thoroughly before eating.
- Produce with a protected fruit or impervious outer skin, such as shell peas, melons, eggplant, sweet corn, or winter squash, should be washed and disinfected before the outer shell, skin, or husk is removed. Then shell, peel, or husk the produce and cook if possible.

For more information on food safety or preservation, contact the Vernon County UW-Extension office at 637-5276.