

Handling Food and Water After a Storm or Flood

After a major storm or flood, you must assume that all water sources are contaminated until proved safe.

Food that has been contaminated by floodwaters should also be handled carefully. Purify all water used for drinking, cooking and washing eating and cooking utensils. Also purify the water used for washing hands, body and kitchen and bathroom surfaces.

Do not try to purify water that has a dark color or odor or contains floating material.

To disinfect water, use one of the following methods:

- Boil at a rolling boil for 1 minute. To lessen the flat taste of boiled water, pour the water back and forth several times between two clean, sanitized containers.
- Add 1/8 teaspoon of unscented liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water. Make sure the bleach contains 5.25 to 6 percent sodium hypochlorite as its only active ingredient. Thoroughly mix the purifying agent in the water and let it stand for at least 30 minutes before using.
- If you are unable to boil water or use chlorine bleach, water purification tablets, such as chlorine dioxide, may be helpful. Use according to manufacturer's directions on the package.

Store water in clean, sanitized containers.

Always use clean or purified water to wash any parts of the body that have come in contact with surfaces contaminated by floodwaters.

Flooded foods that should be discarded:

- Meat, poultry, fish and eggs
- Fresh produce
- Preserves sealed with paraffin
- Unopened jars with waxed cardboard seals, such as mayonnaise and salad dressing
- All foods in cardboard boxes, paper, foil, cellophane or cloth
- Spices, seasonings and extracts
- Home-canned foods
- Opened containers and packages
- Flour, sugar, grain, coffee and other staples in canisters
- Cans dented, leaking, bulging or rusted
- Wooden spoons, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers

“Flooded” foods safe to use:

Inspect canned foods and discard cans that show signs of 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.

Undamaged canned goods and commercial glass jars of food are safe if you sanitize the containers.

Mark contents on can or jar lid with indelible ink. Remove labels. Wash outside of jars and cans in a strong detergent solution with a scrub brush. Immerse these containers for 15 minutes in a solution of 1 tablespoon of chlorine bleach per gallon of room temperature water. Air dry before opening.

Sanitize metal pans, ceramic dishes, utensils (including can openers), dishes and glassware the same way after washing and rinsing.

Disaster Safety Facts

1. More injuries occur in the recovery process than during the disaster.
2. Electrical safety is important after a disaster.
3. Slippery surfaces cause falls and injuries.
4. Be sure the water is safe before you drink it.
5. Snakes and vermin are often prevalent after floods and hurricanes.
6. Gas leaks can cause explosions after disasters.
7. Stress levels are often high after disasters. Learn how to deal with stress.
8. Consider as contaminated all foods that have been in contact with flood water

For additional post-storm and -flood safety tips, contact the parish office of the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, the education and information division of the LSU AgCenter. It is listed under local government in the telephone directory.

References:

- USDA: http://www.fsis.usda.gov/factsheets/keeping_food_Safe_during_an_emergency/index.asp
http://origin-www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Severe_Storms_and_Hurricanes_Guide/index.asp
- CDC: http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/emergency/safe_water/personal.html
- FEMA: <http://www.fema.gov/plan/prepare/watermanage.shtm#chlorination>
- Red Cross: http://oregonpacific.redcross.org/media/Food_Water_Safety.pdf

Authors:

Beth Reames, Ph.D.,
Specialist, Nutrition and Health
Sara Seals, Ph.D. (retired)

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Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, William B. Richardson, Chancellor
Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station, David J. Boethel, Vice Chancellor and Director
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, Paul D. Coreil, Vice Chancellor and Director
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