

Floods can occur at any time and cause significant damage to homes and properties. Sewer backups, leaks, broken water mains, torrential rainfalls, sudden ice thaws and weather disasters, such as hurricanes and storm surges can all result in flooding. Risk of flooding is generally highest in the spring with heavy rains and winter thawing. It is important to understand that flood water can jeopardize the safety of food. Identifying and discarding potentially unsafe food will help reduce the risk of food borne illness.

How does a flood event cause food to be unsafe?

Flood water may carry silt, raw sewage, oil or chemical waste. Food may become unsafe to eat if it comes in contact with contaminated flood water. Even if a food package appears dry it may have been contaminated if the flood water covers or seeps into food containers.

What do you do with unsafe food after a flood?

Inspect all food items thoroughly. Any items that have been in contact with contaminated flood water should be discarded. Even if the food or package appears to be dry it still may not be safe.

Food that has been contaminated or spoiled may not look different. Chemicals or pathogens cannot usually be seen on food. The following food safety tips can help you determine which foods to discard and which to save.

Items that should be discarded:

- **Food wrapped/stored in paper, plastic cloth, fiber or cardboard.** Examples include: dry foods such as flour, sugar, candy, cereal, baked goods, dried beans and rice.
- **All foods with permeable containers** such screw-caps, snap-lids, pull tops and crimped-cap containers. These containers may not be waterproof.

- **Home-canned food in glass containers that have come in contact with the flood water.** Throw away the food and flat part of the lids. Empty glass jars can be washed and sterilized for future use.
- **Food that has come in direct contact with flood water.** This includes meats, fish, poultry, fruits and vegetables (raw or cooked).
- **Commercially-canned foods that are damaged.** Cans that are bulging, swelling, leaking, punctured, dented or have holes, fractures or are rusting should be thrown out.
- **Porous items that may come in contact with food or with person’s mouth.** Examples include: baby bottle nipples and pacifiers; wooden bowls; and plastic, paper or foam food storage containers and utensils.

Only food in commercially sealed, unopened, undamaged, water proof, airtight jars or metal cans may be considered safe once cleaned and sanitized before use.

REMEMBER
WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT

Clean up after a flood

Proper cleaning and sanitizing of all surfaces and equipment that has been in contact with flood water is important. This includes: utensils/silverware, cookware, dishware, food contact surfaces, food preparation equipment, floors, floor drains, and furniture.

Use the following cleaning and sanitizing method:

- Thoroughly wash with soap and warm water.
- Rinse with clean potable water

- Sanitize by immersing for two minutes in:
 - A mild bleach solution made with 5 ml (1 tsp.) bleach per 750 ml (3 cups) water; or
 - Hot water of 77°C (170°F) or hotter
 - Or another approved sanitizer
- Air dry thoroughly

Closed, undamaged cans can be sanitized by immersing them for two minutes in a mild bleach solution made with 5 ml (1 tsp.) bleach per 750 ml (3 cups) of water, or if applicable can place them in water and allowing to boil for at least two minutes.

Labels should be removed prior to washing and sanitizing since they could have come in contact with a contaminant. Be sure to re-label, including the best before date, with a permanent marker.

Flooding event at an Eating Establishment

It is important that all food preparation and service is discontinued until the appropriate steps have been taken to protect public health. Please contact a Public Health Officer with Nova Scotia Environment and Climate Change (NSECC) with questions, through your local office: <https://novascotia.ca/nse/contact.asp>

An inspection may be required prior to re-opening.

What about the water supply after a flood?

Listen to local authorities to determine if tap water is safe to use. If the water is not safe to use, follow instructions to use bottled water ensuring it was not in contact with contaminated flood water. It is also important to follow the proper method to boil or disinfect water for cooking, cleaning, and bathing. If on a private well and/or have an on-site sewage disposal system, please contact your local NSECC office to speak with an Environment Officer for additional information on well disinfection and necessary approvals if repair is required for the on-site sewage disposal system.

Plan Ahead

If possible, raise refrigerators and freezers stored in the basement off the floor. This can be done by putting cement blocks under their corners. Move all food, canned goods, dry goods, food equipment and utensils stored at or near the ground level to a higher dry area.

If you have had a power failure as a result of the flood, please refer to Food Safety factsheet, *After a Power Outage*, located at:

<https://www.novascotia.ca/nse/food-protection/docs/factsheet-poweroff.pdf>

For further information on food safety visit the Nova Scotia Environment and Climate Change Food Safety website at

<https://novascotia.ca/nse/food-protection/>

