

# Food safety after a natural disaster



## Making sure food is safe to eat after a natural disaster is vital to your whanau's health and wellbeing.

### In a natural disaster, several things may occur that put your food safety at risk

- Fridges, freezers and ovens may break down and food could spoil more quickly.
- Water supplies could be cut off or contaminated.
- Sewerage systems could be disrupted/ damaged.

**These ALL put you and your whanau at risk of foodborne illnesses.**

### After an emergency, make sure food is safe

- Make a food safety plan which sees you consuming food from your fridge first, followed by items in your freezer.
- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to help keep them colder for longer.
- Check the food — does it smell or look different? Has the colour changed, and does it have a slimy texture? If YES it is probably unsafe to eat.
- DO NOT refreeze food that has defrosted.
- DO NOT use any tinned food that has been damaged. Eg, the can has broken open, is deeply dented or rusted.
- If in doubt, throw it out.

## Support and information

Food safety is just one step in staying safe during and after an emergency. Civil Defence has more information on what to do in an emergency and where you can get support.

### Waikato Region Civil Defence Emergency Management

[waikatoregioncdemg.govt.nz](http://waikatoregioncdemg.govt.nz)

### Call your district council to contact local Civil Defence staff

Otorohanga District Council  
0800 734 000

Waitomo Council  
07 878 0800

South Waikato District Council  
07 885 0340

Taupo District Council  
0800 275 832

Ruapehu District Council  
07 895 8188

### Report electrical hazards

The Lines Company  
0800 367 328



## To avoid getting sick from food during emergencies follow these steps

- Eat foods that will expire soon first — eg meat and bread as they spoil quicker than non-perishable foods.
- Eat canned and dried foods last.
- Open the fridge and freezer as little as possible.
- DO NOT eat fruit or vegetables that have been in flood waters.
- Cover ALL food with plastic wrap, or store in waterproof containers.
- Leave bottles, drink cans and water containers etc in the fridge if it is working.
- Throw out bad or rotting food before it spoils other food.

## Focus on hygiene when preparing and cooking food

It's harder to keep everything clean when preparing and cooking food in an emergency. Follow these tips for safe preparation and cooking of food:

- ALWAYS wash and dry your hands before preparing food. If water is in short supply keep some in a bowl with disinfectant.
- Ensure ALL kitchen utensils are clean before using.
- Cook food thoroughly.
- Cover ALL food with plastic wrap or store in waterproof containers.

## Make sure water is clean

- Boil or purify water before using it to prepare food. This helps to avoid spreading viruses and bacteria.
- If you do not have power to boil water, purifying tablets or bleach can be added to ensure it is safe. Add 5 drops of household bleach per litre of water and leave for 30 minutes.
- Do NOT use bleaches that contain added scent or perfume, surfactants or other additives — these can make you sick.
- Re-boil water if it is not used within 24 hours.
- You can also use bottled water.

## How do I know what food is safe in my freezer if the power has been off?

If the food is still visibly frozen (eg: it still has ice crystals on it) and the packaging is not damaged or open, you can safely re-freeze it.

DO NOT re-freeze food that has defrosted. Throw it out.

## FAQs

### How can I wash my hands and dishes safely?

To wash your hands before preparing food and to wash your dishes you can use water from a hot water cylinder; a toilet cistern providing no chemical toilet cleaner has been added to it.

### How can I cook without power?

Use camp stoves, open fires or barbeques for cooking. Portable gas appliances MUST be used outside.

### How do I get rid of rubbish when there is no refuse collection?

Store rubbish in a heavy-duty plastic bag and tie it tightly until refuse collections start again.

### Can I still gather food?

DO NOT eat garden produce where the soil has been flooded. DO NOT eat shellfish from the river mouth or harbour after a flood.

### Can I still eat packaged foods that have been in flood waters?

NO. Destroy all unpackaged food and food items packed in paper, cardboard or non-waterproof material that have been exposed directly to flood waters.

### How much should I cook at one time?

Only cook what you need for one meal. DO NOT save leftovers.

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