

# Power Outages and Food Safety At Home

Power outages occur periodically in Alberta for a variety of reasons. In addition to being disruptive, a lack of sustained electricity can also pose risks to foods stored in impacted refrigerators and freezers. Power surges can also cause damage to equipment and to the electrical system in the home, which can further impact functioning of refrigeration devices, and thus, further risk the safety of your food.

Below are some food safety steps to be taken during and after a power outage in your home.

## *Handling Refrigerated and Frozen Food during a Power Outage:*

- Do not open the refrigerator or freezer door unless absolutely necessary. This will help maintain the cold temperature.
- Freezing stops the growth of bacteria. Without power and so long as the doors are kept closed, freezers that are completely full can keep foods frozen for up to two days. Half-full freezers can keep foods frozen for one day.
- An unopened refrigerator will keep food cold for about 4 hours.
- Do not place refrigerated or frozen food outside, even in winter. The sun's rays could warm or thaw chilled or frozen food even when the outdoor temperature is very cold, and animals could contaminate your food.

## *Handling Refrigerated and Frozen Food after a Power Outage:*

- Surge damage may have occurred to electric appliances, so check that refrigerators and freezers are still working and can maintain proper cold temperatures. Review any electronic settings that may have been reset when the refrigerator or freezer was off.
- Normal refrigerator temperature is 4°C. When the refrigerator is warmer than normal, **high risk foods** that are more likely to become dangerous include meat, fish and shellfish, eggs, dairy, cooked foods and leftovers, and produce that has been cut. These are considered high risk foods.
- Check the food in your home:
  - Discard high risk foods stored in refrigerators, coolers and freezers IF the temperature was greater than 4°C for more than 2 hours.
  - NOTE: If you don't have a thermometer and can't measure the refrigerator temperature, discard any of the above listed high risk foods that are no longer cool to the touch.

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**For more information, please contact your nearest Environmental Public Health office.**

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- Also discard any frozen food that has no ice crystals or is thawed and/or is no longer cool to the touch.
- Discard any food that has an obvious unusual colour or odour, even if the refrigerator or freezer maintained cold temperatures at all times.
- Frozen food that still contains ice crystals or feels cool to the touch can be re-frozen.
- If frozen raw food has leaked during thawing, clean and sanitize the areas where the food has leaked or touched. A sanitizer can be made by mixing 1 teaspoon of ordinary household bleach for every 4 cups of water.
- If there are unwanted odours in the fridge and freezer, you can take these steps to clean, sanitize and deodorize:
  1. Unplug the refrigerator and freezer.
  2. Clean the inside with soap and water and then rinse with clean water.
  3. Sanitize the inside with a bleach/water mixture made by mixing 1 teaspoon of ordinary household bleach for every 4 cups of water.
  4. Leave the doors of the refrigerator and freezer open to help them dry out.
  5. Once the appliance is dry, reconnect the power.
  6. If possible, use a thermometer to know that the inside temperature of your refrigerator has reached 4C before restocking it with food.
  7. If possible, use a thermometer to know that the freezer temperature is at -18C before restocking it with food.

## ***REMEMBER: When in doubt, throw it out!***

- Keep in mind that food contaminated with bacteria does not necessarily smell bad or appear spoiled. If in doubt, don't take the chance: throw it out!

This document adapted in part from Health Canada's "[Food Safety in an Emergency](http://www.inspection.gc.ca/food/information-for-consumers/fact-sheets-and-infographics/food-handling/emergency/eng/1331578972167/1331579901110)"  
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