



Maryland Poison Center
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1-800-222-1222

Poison

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Food Safety During a Power Outage

Power outages can occur anytime. How do you know if your refrigerated and frozen food is safe to eat when the power comes back on? Follow these guidelines.

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- The refrigerator will keep food cold for ~4 hours if unopened.
- A full freezer will hold the temperature for 48 hours (24 hours if half full) if the door remains closed.
- For prolonged power outages, store refrigerated items in a cooler with ice.
- When power comes back on, frozen food that still has ice crystals or is at 40°F or below is safe to refreeze or cook.
- Discard any meat, poultry, fish, eggs or leftovers that have been above 40°F for 2 hours or more.
- Always remember: when in doubt, throw it out!

Did you know that...

In 2009, the Maryland Poison Center managed 673 calls dealing with food products/food poisoning?

There are more than 250 foodborne diseases?

Summertime Food Safety

Summertime is here and who doesn't like getting together with friends and family for cookouts and picnics? The Center for Disease Control estimates that about 76 million people become ill, and 5,000 die from foodborne illness in the U.S. each year. What steps should you take to make sure your gathering goes off without a hitch?

First, make sure you wash your hands with warm soapy water before and after handling food. Sing the Alphabet Song while washing to make sure you have washed thoroughly.

Second, utensils, dishes and work surfaces should be thoroughly washed after working with food. Make sure raw meat and its juice do not come in contact with ready-to-eat food. When taking food off of the grill, make sure you put it on a clean plate and not the same plate that held the raw food (unless you wash the plate thoroughly first).

Third, make sure the grill is pre-heated before placing the food on it. A food thermometer is a good idea when cooking on the grill to make sure the food is cooked properly. Temperature guides are available in many cookbooks and on the internet. Cooking temperatures vary based on the type of meat or fish.

Fourth, refrigerate leftovers right away. Do not leave perishable food out for more than 2 hours. If the temperature outside is 90° or above, food should be refrigerated within 1 hour. Remember: when in doubt, throw it out!

Food poisoning is the common term used to describe an illness that occurs after eating or drinking a food or beverage. The illness is usually caused by a virus or bacteria that contaminated the food during food preparation. If the food or drink is responsible for your symptoms, everyone who ate or drank the same food will also be affected.

Common symptoms of food poisoning are nausea, vomiting, stomach cramps and diarrhea. Fever and chills may or may not be present. Symptoms usually develop suddenly and within 48 hours of eating. In most cases, food poisoning is not serious and the symptoms will go away on their own in 24-48 hours.

Treating food poisoning mainly involves drinking fluids to replace the ones being lost due to vomiting and diarrhea. Medicines that stop vomiting or diarrhea are usually not recommended as this is the way the virus or bacteria gets out of the body. Contact your physician if the symptoms do not go away within 48 hours, if the person cannot keep any liquids down or if the person cannot take their normal medicines because of vomiting. Young children and seniors should be observed more closely.

Picnics and cookouts are not the only source of food poisoning. Illness caused by food eaten in restaurants should be reported to the local county health department where the restaurant is located. If you have questions about food poisoning, contact the Maryland Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 or go to www.foodsafety.gov for more information and charts on food safety.

