

Guidelines for Food Safety During Short-Term Power Outages

Consumer Fact Sheet

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All Californians now and then experience random, unplanned power outages. These power outages are commonly known as blackouts.

Certain foods are a safety concern during a blackout. Moist, perishable foods need special handling. Bacteria can grow quickly when these foods are kept in the temperature danger zone (40° to 140°F, or 4° to 60°C).

A power outage of 2 hours or less is not considered hazardous to food that is stored under safe conditions when the outage begins. For blackouts of more than 2 hours, please consult publications that specifically deal with longer power outages (see "For More Information," below).

FROZEN FOODS

Keep the freezer door closed. A full freezer will stay at freezing temperatures for about 2 days. Short power outages should not affect the safety of frozen foods. Make sure the freezer turns on when the power is restored.

REFRIGERATED FOODS

Return cold, perishable foods that might be at room temperature to the refrigerator as quickly as possible when the power goes out. Keep the refrigerator door closed as much as possible during the outage.

In general, cold foods kept in a refrigerator should be safe during power outages of less than 4 hours. Make sure the refrigerator turns on when the power is restored.

FOODS IN PREPARATION DURING A POWER OUTAGE

When the power goes out, make sure you turn off heat-producing appliances like electric stoves. This will prevent fires if the appliances are unattended when the power is restored.

Partially cooked meat and poultry can be a food safety risk during a power outage. If you are using an electric cooking appliance during an outage and the meat is not fully cooked, you have two options.

1. Continue cooking on an outdoor grill or camp stove. Cook until the meat and poultry reaches a safe internal temperature (see the table below).

Cook leftovers to an internal temperature of at least 165°F (74°C). Always use a thermometer to measure the temperature.

OR

2. Throw away the partially cooked meat or poultry.

Partially cooked combination foods (e.g., casseroles) should be cooled quickly on ice or in an ice and water bath. When power is restored, heat the food to at least 165°F (74°C). If this is not possible and the power outage is longer than 1 hour, throw the food item away. This is especially important if the ingredients were raw before they were combined.

Completely cooked foods. Serve completely cooked foods as soon as possible. Do not place warm leftovers in the refrigerator when the power is out. Instead, if possible, chill leftover foods using ice or an ice and water bath. Place these foods in the refrigerator after power is restored. Leftovers kept in the danger zone (40° to 140°F, or 4° to 60°C) for longer than 2 hours should be thrown away.

Cooking Temperatures

Recommended by the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline

Temperature

°F	°C	Product
145	63	beef, lamb, and veal steaks and roasts, medium rare
160	71	beef, lamb, and veal steaks and roasts, medium
160	71	ground meats (beef, pork, veal, and lamb) pork chops, ribs, and roasts egg dishes
165	74	ground turkey and chicken stuffing and casseroles leftovers
170	77	chicken and turkey breasts
180	82	chicken and turkey (whole bird, legs, thighs and wings)

To contact the Hotline, see "For More Information," on next page.



Partially-cooked vegetables may be

1. Eaten as is.
2. Cooked completely using a grill or camp stove.

OR

3. Chilled quickly in ice water and fully cooked when the power is restored.

Fresh fruits and vegetables. Intact, uncut fresh fruits and vegetables are not a safety concern if they are not refrigerated for extended periods of time. However, once fresh fruits and vegetables have been cut, they should be considered perishable foods and should not be kept in the danger zone (40° to 140°F, or 4° to 60°C) for more than 2 hours.

PLAN AHEAD

Keep the following on hand:

- Matches, charcoal, or propane for use with grill or camp stove.
- Bottled water. City water use should be minimized during a power outage.
- Ice. Use ice for keeping foods cold or for cooling warm foods.

FOR ROLLING BLACKOUTS

During very hot weather, plan meals that don't require the use of electrical appliances. Prepare foods during nonpeak hours (peak hours are approximately 2 to 8 P.M.), chill, and serve cold (e.g., salads or sandwiches) instead of preparing hot foods.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Fight BAC!—Partnership for Food Safety Education website, www.fightbac.org

Gateway to Government Food Safety Information website: www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg/fsgadvic.html

Keeping Food Safe During A Power Outage, USDA Food Safety and Inspection service publication available online at www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/pubs/pofeature.htm

Ready or Not? Planning for an Emergency ANR Publication ANRP014, 1997.

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline: 1-800-535-4555 or e-mail mphotline.fsis@usda.gov

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