

Freezer Safety

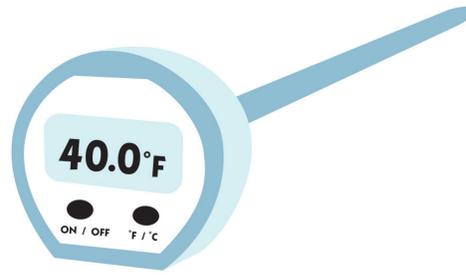
A full freezer will remain below 40°F (4°C) for about two days, and a less-than-full freezer will maintain that temperature for approximately one day. Rearrange meats so their juices do not drip onto other foods as the meats begin to thaw. Throw away any ready-to-eat item that comes in contact with meat juices.

Frozen foods that have partially or completely thawed can be refrozen if they contain ice crystals. If they have completely thawed but are still at a temperature of 40°F (4°C) or below, they also can be refrozen. Use a digital thermometer to check the temperature of the food. Although partial thawing and refreezing of these foods will be safe, the quality of some foods, especially vegetables and fruits, may be reduced. Hard cheeses, breads, and fruits and vegetables and their juices—if they look and smell normal—can be refrozen even if they have been above 40°F (4°C) for more than two hours.

One way to ensure the safety of thawed meat products that have been above 40°F (4°C) for two hours or less is to cook them immediately. Either serve the food immediately or refreeze the cooked item. Be sure to cook to the proper temperatures, checking internal temperatures with a digital thermometer. Refrigerate and use within two days or freeze the leftovers immediately.

While the symptoms of a foodborne illness may be flu-like in nature, it can be life threatening and have long-term health consequences. Although anyone can develop a foodborne illness, those at a greater risk include pregnant women, young children, older adults, and people with immune systems weakened by disease or medical treatment.

Don't take chances on your family's safety for the sake of a few dollars in groceries. Remember, when in doubt, throw it out!



Originally prepared by Mary Alice Gettings, nutrition and food safety educator. Updated by Sharon McDonald, senior extension educator and food safety specialist.

Resources

Penn State Food Safety Website
extension.psu.edu/food-safety-and-processing

Food Safety and Inspection Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250-3700
www.fsis.usda.gov

Meat and Poultry Food Safety Hotline
1-800-535-4555

extension.psu.edu

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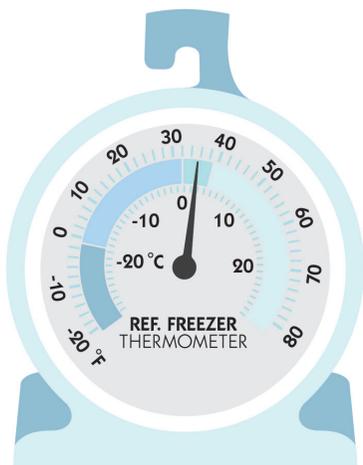
PennState Extension

Keeping Food Safe When the Power Goes Out!

As a result of thunderstorms, ice storms, and other disturbances, power outages occur more often than we desire. Outages are not only an inconvenience, but also a safety issue, particularly when it comes to food. When refrigerators and freezers lose power, we worry about whether or not the food will be safe for our families. Knowing how to handle food while the power is off and when it has been restored will help to ensure that you and your family do not become victims of a foodborne illness.

To monitor temperatures, it's important to keep an appliance thermometer in both the refrigerator and the freezer at all times. This approach will take the guesswork out of determining the temperature of your units. Also, keep a digital thermometer on hand. This utensil will enable you to check the temperature of thawed foods to determine their safety.

When the power goes out, try to find out how long it is expected to be off. If it will be for only a few hours, don't do anything. Open the freezer or refrigerator door as little as possible to allow the units to maintain their chilled temperatures longer.



Refrigerator Safety

If the power is off for more than two hours, you should begin to monitor the temperature of the refrigerator. Keep the thermometer close to the opening of the door. This step will allow you to open the door only slightly, keeping the temperature lower. Check the temperature each hour. When it reaches 40°F (4°C), place block ice in a container in the refrigerator. You also might consider placing perishable items in a cooler with ice or ice packs around them.

If the temperature of the refrigerator rises above 40°F (4°C) for more than two hours, you will need to discard the perishable foods listed below:

- meat, poultry, seafood
- cold cuts, hot dogs
- casseroles
- custards, pudding
- cream, sour cream
- soft cheeses, shredded cheeses, low-fat cheeses
- yogurt, milk
- eggs
- creamy salad dressings, fish sauces, hoisin sauce, opened spaghetti sauce
- cookie dough, refrigerator biscuits or rolls
- cooked pasta, rice, pasta salads
- pizza
- cut fresh fruits
- greens, cooked vegetables, opened vegetable juice
- baked or mashed potatoes, potato salad

Any food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture also should be discarded. Never taste foods to determine their safety!

Foods that are safe, even if held at 40°F (4°C) or above for more than two hours, are:

- hard and processed cheeses that are properly wrapped
- grated Parmesan and Romano cheeses
- margarine that is properly wrapped
- canned or uncut fresh fruit and fruit juices (but discard if they look, feel, smell, or taste unusual)
- fresh vegetables, canned vegetables
- herbs, spices
- breads, rolls, cakes, muffins, bagels, pancakes, waffles
- peanut butter, jelly, relish, mustard, ketchup, olives
- taco, barbecue, and soy sauces
- opened jars of mayonnaise, tartar sauce, or horseradish (unless held at 50°F (10°C) for more than eight hours—then throw them away)

Bacteria grow between the temperatures of 40°F (4°C) and 140°F (60°C), the “temperature danger zone.”

