

University of California  
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# UC FOOD SAFETY CE UPDATE



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## Power Outages and Food Safety

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Whether the power has gone out due to weather, equipment issues or intentional safety policy, the first question is always the same, "Is the food in my refrigerator safe?". Read on for the answer to this question and food safety precautions to take before, during, and after a power outage.

## Prepare Yourself Before Power Emergencies

1. Make sure you have appliance thermometers in your refrigerator *and* freezer. Check to ensure that the freezer temperature is at or below 0°F, and the refrigerator is at or below 40°F.
2. Freeze containers of water for ice to help keep food cold in the freezer, refrigerator, or coolers in case the power goes out. If your normal water supply is contaminated or unavailable due to power outage, the melting ice will also supply drinking water.
3. Freeze refrigerated items such as leftovers, milk, and fresh meat and poultry that you may not need immediately. This helps keep them at a safe temperature longer.
4. Group food together in the freezer. This helps the food stay cold longer.
5. Have coolers on hand to keep refrigerated food cold, if the power will be out for more than 4 hours.
6. Purchase or make ice cubes in advance, and freeze gel packs ahead of time. Store all of these in the freezer for future use in the refrigerator or in coolers.
7. Check out local sources to know where dry ice and block ice can be purchased, in case it should be needed.
8. Make sure to have a supply of bottled water stored where it will be as safe as possible from flooding. If your bottled water has an odor, do not drink or use it.

California's CalFresh Healthy Living, with funding from the United States Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – USDA SNAP, produced this material. These institutions are equal opportunity providers and employers. For important nutrition information, visit [www.CalFreshHealthyLiving.org](http://www.CalFreshHealthyLiving.org).

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## Power Outages: During and After

### If the Power Goes Out . . .

Follow these basic tips to keep food safe:

1. Keep the **refrigerator and freezer doors closed** as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature.
  - ▶ The **refrigerator** will keep food **cold for about 4 hours**, if it is unopened.
  - ▶ A full freezer will keep the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full), if the door remains closed.
2. Buy dry or block ice to keep the refrigerator as cold as possible, if the power is going to be out for a prolonged period of time. Fifty pounds of dry ice should keep an 18 cubic foot, fully stocked freezer cold for two days.
3. If at any point the food in your refrigerator or freezer was above 40°F for 2 hours or more (or 1 hour if temperatures are above 90°F) — discard it.



### Once Power Is Restored . . .

Determine the safety of your food:

1. If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, check the temperature when the power comes back on. If the freezer thermometer reads 40°F or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen.
2. If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine its safety. You can't rely on appearance or odor. If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40°F or below, it is safe to refreeze or cook.
3. If the power was out for no more than 4 hours, refrigerated food should be safe as long as the doors were kept closed. When the power comes back on, check the temperature in the refrigerator or of the food. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, seafood, milk, eggs, or leftovers) that has been at refrigerator temperatures above 40°F for 4 hours or more. Perishable foods with temperatures that are 45°F or below (measured with a food thermometer) should be safe, but should be cooked and consumed as soon as possible.

**Perishable food such as meat, poultry, seafood, milk, and eggs that are not kept adequately refrigerated or frozen may cause illness if consumed, even when they are thoroughly cooked.**