FOOD, UTENSILS NEED SPECIAL HANDLING AFTER A FLOOD

Food contamination from floodwaters is often a problem because these waters can carry silt, raw sewage, oil or chemical wastes which make food unsafe to eat. In addition, flood-related power outages can cause spoilage of foods stored in freezers and refrigerators. It is essential that food be handled carefully after a flood.

Contamination by floodwaters is possible if water has covered, dripped on or seeped into the food. Although some containers may fully protect the food, if you are unsure, it's best to throw it out rather than risk food-borne disease.

Discarding Food … Discard the following foods if they have come in contact with floodwater.

- Containers of nuts, spices, seasonings and flavorings.
- Canisters of bags of grains, sugars, salts, coffee and tea.
- Food stored in paper, plastic, cloth, fiber or cardboard boxes
- Pastas, cereals, rice, dried milk, crackers, cookies or mixes that are in plastic bags inside of boxes and other containers.
- Food in screw-topped and crimp-topped jars or bottles that have been touched by floodwaters, even if never opened. This includes any foods in glass jars and bottles, such as jams, jellies, honey, molasses, syrups, fruits, pickles and home canned foods. Because no lid on glass food containers will keep water out if immersed, the fool will be contaminated.
- Porous non-food items used with food or put in the mouth and items made of hard rubber, plastic or other flexible and porous materials. This includes baby bottle nipples, pacifiers and plastic or wooden dishes and utensils.

Sanitizing Utensils … You can save some cans of food as well as dishes and utensils of glass, ceramic, china and metal by disinfecting them according to the following.

Cans of food without dents or rust can be saved if they are handled properly before they are opened. Remove labels and re-label each can with a permanent marker. Wash the cans in a strong detergent solution with a scrub brush to remove all silt. Make a chlorine disinfecting solution according to directions below.

Immerse scrubbed containers completely in the lukewarm chlorine solution for one minute. Remove containers from the solution and allow to air dry before opening. Re-label with a marker if necessary. Use as soon as possible because containers may rust.

Dishes and utensils of glass, ceramic, china or metal, including glass baby bottles and canning jars, also can be saved by disinfecting. Wash them thoroughly in strong detergent solution to remove all filth and mud. Disinfect metal pots, pans and utensils by boiling in water for 10 minutes.

To make the chlorine disinfecting solution check your bleach label for chlorine content. Household bleaches can contain 2 to 6 percent chlorine. Then mix bleach with water, based on the percent chlorine in your bleach, as follows.

If the bleach has 2 percent chlorine add 2 teaspoons of bleach to 1 quart water or 2 tablespoons of bleach to 1 gallon water. If it has 4 percent chlorine, and 1 teaspoon of bleach to 1 quart water or 1 tablespoon of bleach to 1 gallon water. If the bleach has 6 percent chlorine, add ½ teaspoon bleach to 1 quart water or 2 teaspoons of bleach to 1 gallon water.

Source: University of Minnesota Extension Service