

SANITIZE DISHES, PANS AFTER FLOOD

Dishes, pots and pans that have been covered by floodwater should be carefully inspected, washed and disinfected before they are used again, advises Mary Years, Iowa State University Extension housing specialist.

First, inspect all items, she says. Discard any items made of porous material, such as wood, plastic or rubber. Any dishes with deep cracks should be thrown away as well. These items can't be sanitized.

Wash the remaining items in hot detergent solution, using a brush, if necessary, to remove dirt. If handles from frying pans and saucepans are removable, clean them separately. Equipment that can be taken apart should be cleaned in pieces.

After sudsing and brushing, rinse in clear hot water. Then immerse in a chlorine solution to sanitize. Use a solution of two tablespoons of liquid household bleach to a gallon of water.

To sanitize metal items, boil them in water for at least two minutes.

Let all items air-dry, Years recommends. Do not dry them with a dishtowel.

Kitchen items made of iron probably will be rusted. Remove rust by scouring with steel wool. After scouring and sanitizing iron items, season them before use to prevent food from sticking to them. Lightly coat the cooking surfaces with cooking oil and place them in an oven at 250 degrees F for two to three hours. The oil will seal the pores of the metal so food will not stick easily.

If cupboards and food preparation surfaces were in contact with floodwater, clean and sanitize them before storing the clean dishes, pots and pans, Years says. Wash the surfaces with hot detergent solution. Then sanitize them using a solution of two tablespoons of liquid household bleach to a gallon of water.

Is Home-Frozen Food Safe to Use?

If your home freezer has been covered with flood water, there is a good chance that seepage damaged the food inside. This food should be discarded, according to Patricia Redlinger, Iowa State University Extension food science specialist.

Even if no flood waters covered the freezer or seeped inside, some foods may be unsafe due to power outage. The amount and type of food inside the freezer will determine whether it can be saved. A full, freestanding freezer will stay at freezing temperatures about two days; a half-full freezer about one day.

How long the food in a freezer will stay frozen also depends upon:

- The kind of food in the freezer. For example, meat and other dense foods will not warm as fast as a freezer full of baked food.
- The temperature of the food. The colder the food, the longer it will stay frozen.
- The freezer. A well-insulated freezer with good gaskets will keep food frozen much longer than one with little insulation or poor gaskets.
- Size of the freezer. The larger the freezer, the longer food will stay frozen.

If the meat has been completely thawed and does not have a questionable odor, it should be used immediately. Meat, poultry and fish should be discarded if there are any signs of spoilage. Thawed foods can be safely refrozen in two situations. First, if it still contains ice crystals. Second, if it has thawed, but is still cold (about 40 degrees F) and has been kept at refrigerator temperature not more than one or two days. Partial thawing and refreezing reduces the quality of foods, especially fruits and vegetables.

Avoid Risk of Flood-Contaminated Food

If all of the food was not removed from the basement and off kitchen and pantry shelves, Patricia Redlinger, Iowa State University Extension food science specialist, cautions about the risk of using food that has come in contact with flood water.

“Food contamination is often a problem after a flood because flood water can carry silt, raw sewage, oil or chemical wastes,” Redlinger says. “Flood waters can carry the risk of typhoid or other dangerous diseases. Filth and disease-causing bacteria can contaminate any food the water comes in contact with and make that food unsafe to eat.”

Metal cans of food that are free of dents or rust can be saved if they are handled properly prior to opening. Remove the labels and re-label each can with a permanent marker. Examine cans for leaks or bulges. Destroy if the seal was broken or the can has bulged. Wash the unopened cans in a strong detergent solution. Use a brush to remove all silt. Then, immerse the scrubbed containers in a lukewarm solution of chlorine for one minute. (Use 1 tablespoon of household chlorine bleach to each gallon of water.) Allow cans to thoroughly air-dry before opening or storing in a clean, dry, disinfected place.

Fresh fruits and vegetables should not be saved. Do not try to save the following foods if flood water has covered, dripped on or seeped into the package.

- Containers of nuts, spices, seasonings and flavorings.
- Canisters or bags of grains, sugars, salt, coffee and tea.
- Food in paper, plastic, cloth, fiber or cardboard packages (e.g., pasta, cereal, crackers, mixes).
- Jars or bottles of food that have screw-top or crimp-top lids. This includes all home-canned and commercially canned foods in glass jars (e.g., jams and jellies, honey, molasses, syrups, fruits, pickles, vegetables, baby food, condiments).

Discard any porous (wood, plastic, rubber) non-food items that are used with food or come in contact with the mouth, such as bottle nipples, pacifiers, plastic storage containers, wooden dishes, disposable silverware or plastic utensils.

Glass and china dishes, metal and glass cookware, glass baby bottles and empty canning jars can be saved. Wash them in a strong detergent solution; remove all filth and mud. Disinfect china and glass dishes in a chlorine solution, following the same method as above. Disinfect metal pots, pans, utensils and silverware by boiling in water for 10 minutes.

Source: Iowa State University Extension Service