

Food Safety in the Home After a Hurricane and/or Flooding

After a hurricane and/or flooding, people need to assess all food and food preparation areas and equipment to decide what to keep or throw away. Hurricanes, especially if accompanied by a tidal surge or flooding, can contaminate the public water supply. Water in the hurricane-affected area may not be safe to drink. Local announcements should provide updated information on the supply.

- Do not eat any food that may have come into contact with flood water. **If in doubt, throw it out.**
- Do not eat food packed in plastic, paper, cardboard, cloth and similar containers that have been water damaged.
- Discard food and beverage containers with screw-caps, snap lids, crimped caps (soda bottles), twist caps, flip tops and home canned foods, if they have come in contact with flood water. These containers cannot be disinfected.
- Undamaged, commercially-prepared foods in all-metal cans or retort pouches can be saved if you remove the labels, thoroughly wash the cans, rinse them, and then disinfect them with a sanitizing solution consisting of 1 tablespoon of bleach per gallon of potable water. Finally, re-label containers that had the labels removed, including the expiration date, with a marker.

Water

Area health departments will determine whether the tap water can be used for drinking. If the water is not potable or is questionable and bottled water is not available, then follow these directions to purify it:

1. Use **bottled water** that has not been exposed to flood waters if it is available.
2. If you don't have bottled water, you should **boil water** to make it safe. Boiling water will kill most types of disease-causing organisms that may be present. If the water is cloudy, filter it through clean cloths or allow it to settle, and draw off the clear water for boiling. Boil the water and let it cool, and store it in clean containers with covers.
3. If you can't boil water, you can **disinfect it using household bleach**. Bleach will kill some, but not all, types of disease-causing organisms that may be in the water. If the water is cloudy, filter it through clean cloths or allow it to settle, and draw off the clear water for disinfection. **Add ½ teaspoon (or 8 drops)** of regular, unscented, liquid household bleach **for each gallon of water**, stir it well and let it stand for 30 minutes before you use it. Store disinfected water in clean containers with covers.
4. If you have a well that has been flooded, the water should be tested and disinfected after flood waters recede. If you suspect that your well may be contaminated, contact your local or state health department or agriculture extension agent for specific advice.