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# Keeping Food and Water Safe after a Flood

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This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

## Food Affected by Flooding

Food may not be safe to eat after a flood and it is important that these items are discarded. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency recommends the following:

- After a flood, the best thing to do is throw away any food (including packaged food) that has been contaminated by the flood water. Even if the food appears to be dry it still may not be safe.
- Throw away all meats, fish, poultry, fresh fruits and vegetables that have come in contact with flood water. As well, food in glass or plastic jars and bottles may be unsafe as the flood water may seep into the lids of these containers and may contaminate the food.
- Inspect food carefully after a flood. Contamination can occur if bacteria in flood water comes in contact with the food.
- Only food in sealed, airtight metal cans is entirely safe, however, the cans must be carefully cleaned and disinfected before use.
- Cans can be cleaned by washing them in a strong detergent solution and then immersing them in a mild bleach and water solution (5 ml/1 tsp. bleach per 750 ml/3 cups water), for 2 minutes to prevent potential contamination when the can is opened.
- Cans that are bulging or damaged are considered unsafe and unusable and should be thrown away immediately.
- Home canned foods in glass containers that have come in contact with flood water are not safe. Throw away the food and the flat part of the lid. The empty jars can be sterilized for future use.

## Clean and Disinfect Food-Contact Surfaces

- It is best to disinfect all equipment that has come into contact with flood water in very hot water, 77°C (170° F).
- Disinfect wood or plastic cutting boards and your counter top with a mild bleach solution (5 ml/1 tsp. bleach per 750 ml/3 cups water).
- Slicing or grinding machines must also be cleaned and disinfected before you use them to ensure that no bacteria remain on the surface of the equipment.
- The most important final step is to allow surfaces and equipment to air dry when putting away clean equipment.
- Do not lay one wet cutting board on top of another. Bacteria may multiply in trapped water.
- Allow all utensils and dishes to air dry before they are put away.
- If you suspect that your equipment and utensils have become contaminated during storage, clean and sanitize them just prior to use, even though you may have already cleaned, or sanitized them.

## Water Affected by Flooding

After a flood, water may not be safe to drink, clean with, or bathe. Water can become contaminated with microorganisms, such as bacteria, sewage, and other substances that can cause illness or death.

### **If you have a municipal water supply:**

- Listen to and follow public announcements. Local authorities will tell you if municipal tap water is safe to use. If the water is not safe to use, follow instructions given by local authorities to use boiled (1 minute rolling boil) water or alternate water supply such as bottled water for cooking or preparing food, making baby formula, washing dishes, cleaning, brushing your teeth, washing your hands, making ice, and bathing.

### **If you have a well and/or cistern water supply:**

- If your well and/or cistern has been flooded, it may be contaminated. Until you can get your well tested to ensure it is safe to drink, you should use boiled (1 minute rolling boil) water or an alternate water supply such as bottled water for cooking or preparing food, making baby formula, washing dishes, cleaning, brushing your teeth, washing your hands, making ice, and bathing.

- Boiling water, when practical, is the preferred way to kill harmful bacteria and parasites. Bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute will kill most organisms. Boiling will not remove chemical contaminants. If you suspect or are informed that the water is contaminated with chemicals, seek another source of water, such as bottled water.
- Do not rely on water disinfection methods or devices that have not been recommended by your local public health unit.
- Once the flood water has receded, your well and/or cistern will need to be disinfected. Refer to Health Canada's fact sheet on well maintenance and disinfection procedures. For further information contact your local health unit ([http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/contact/phu/phuloc\\_mn.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/contact/phu/phuloc_mn.html)).

## Sources

Canadian Food Inspection Agency - *Food Safety Facts on Flooding*  
<http://www.inspection.gc.ca/english/fssa/concen/tipcon/floodse.shtml>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - *Fact Sheet: Keep Food and Water Safe After a Disaster or Power Outage*  
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater/facts.asp>

Health Canada – *What's in Your Well? - A Guide to Well Water Treatment and Maintenance*  
[http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/water-eau/well-puits\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/water-eau/well-puits_e.html)