



## Safe Food Operations During Power Loss

With local areas hit by power outages from storms, the Allegheny County Health Department offers advice on how to preserve perishable foods without refrigeration and how to tell when food is spoiled and should be discarded.

Here are some recommendations:

- Keep an appliance thermometer in the refrigerator and freezer at all times to see if food is being stored at safe temperatures (40°F for the refrigerator; 0°F for the freezer). The key to determining the safety of foods in the refrigerator and freezer is how cold they are. Most foodborne illness is caused by bacteria that multiply rapidly at temperatures above 40°F.
- Leave the freezer door closed. A full freezer should keep food safe about 2 days; a half-full freezer, about 1 day. Add bags of ice or dry ice to the freezer if it appears the power will be off for an extended time. You can safely refreeze thawed foods that still contain ice crystals or feel cold to the touch.
- Refrigerated items should be safe as long as the power is out no more than 4 to 6 hours. Discard any perishable food that has been above 40°F for 2 hours or more, and any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture. Leave the door closed; every time you open it, needed cold air escapes causing the foods inside to reach unsafe temperatures.
- If it appears the power will be off more than six hours, transfer refrigerated perishable foods to an insulated cooler filled with ice or frozen gel packs. Keep a thermometer in the cooler to be sure the food stays at 40°F or below.
- Never taste food to determine its safety. Some foods may look and smell fine, but if they've been at room temperature longer than two hours, bacteria able to cause foodborne illness can begin to multiply very rapidly. Some types will produce toxins which are not destroyed by cooking and can possibly cause illness

See [www.ACHD.net](http://www.ACHD.net) for a guide on how long foods should be refrigerated.

For more information about food safety during a power outage or disaster, call the Allegheny County Health Department at (412) 687-ACHD.

Please contact our office if you have any questions or need clarification:

Allegheny County Health Department  
Food Safety Program  
3901 Penn Avenue, Bldg. #1  
Pittsburgh, PA 15224-1318  
412-578-8044 – Fax: 412-578-8190  
[foodsafety@alleghenycounty.us](mailto:foodsafety@alleghenycounty.us)