

DHHS Provides Recommendations on Food Safety After Tropical Storm Irene

The New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is releasing food safety recommendations for retail establishments and residents who have lost power or been affected by flooding as a result of Tropical Storm Irene.

For residential homes:

DHHS recommends taking the following steps during and after a flood or loss of electrical power:

- Never taste food to determine its safety
- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature
- The refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about 4 hours if it is unopened. A full freezer will hold the temperature approximately 48 hours (24 hours if its half full and the door remains closed)
- Food can be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is at 40°F or below
- Get block ice or dry ice to keep your refrigerator and freezer as cold as possible if the power is going to be out for an extended period of time
- Discard refrigerated perishable food such as meat, poultry, fish, soft cheeses, milk, eggs, leftovers, and deli items after 4 hours without power
- Do not eat any food that has come into contact with floodwater
- Discard wooden cutting boards, plastic utensils, baby bottle nipples and pacifiers if they have come into contact with floodwaters because there is no way to safely clean them
- Thoroughly wash metal pans, ceramic dishes, and metal utensils with soap and hot water and sanitize by boiling them in clean water or by immersing them for 15 minutes in a solution of 1/4 cup of unscented household bleach per gallon of water if they came into contact with flood water
- When in doubt, throw it out.

For retail establishments:

Retail establishments are reminded that they should cease operation and contact the Food Protection Section when they have experienced any of the following:

- disruption of water service or interruption of electrical service for longer than 2 hours,
- have a contaminated water supply or failed sewer system
- experience flooding in the establishment or any other event that could result in the contamination of the establishment or the food supply

The Food Protection Section will approve the resumption of operations when an imminent health hazard no longer exists or when the establishment has offered a plan to mitigate all threats to health and safety.

Retail establishments with questions about safe food handling during a power outage or flood should visit the DHHS website at <http://www.dhhs.state.nh.us/dphs/fp/documents/emergency.pdf> for a copy of the Emergency Action Plan for Retail Establishments.

Consumers or establishments can reach the DPHS Food Protection Section at 603-271-4589 or by email at foodprotection@dhhs.state.nh.us.