

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. "Floodwaters 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 (i.e. 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 (i.e. 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: Patricia Redlinger, Extension Food Science Specialist, Iowa State University Extension.