

IS HOME-FROZEN FOOD SAFE TO USE?

If your home freezer has been covered with floodwater, there is a good chance that seepage damaged the food inside. This food should be discarded, according to Patricia Redlinger, Iowa State University Extension food science specialist.

Even if no flood waters covered the freezer or seeped inside, some foods may be unsafe due to power outage. The amount and type of food inside the freezer will determine whether it can be saved. A full, freestanding freezer will stay at freezing temperatures about two days; a half-full freezer about one day.

How long the food in a freezer will stay frozen also depends upon:

- The kind of food in the freezer. For example, meat and other dense foods will not warm as fast as a freezer full of baked food.
- The temperature of the food. The colder the food, the longer it will stay frozen.
- The freezer. A well-insulated freezer with good gaskets will keep food frozen much longer than one with little insulation or poor gaskets.
- Size of the freezer. The larger the freezer, the longer food will stay frozen.

If the meat has been completely thawed and does not have a questionable odor, it should be used immediately. Meat, poultry and fish should be discarded if there are any signs of spoilage. Thawed foods can be safely refrozen in two situations. First, if it still contains ice crystals. Second, if it has thawed, but is still cold (about 40°F) and has been kept at refrigerator temperature not more than one or two days. Partial thawing and refreezing reduces the quality of foods, especially fruits and vegetables.

For additional information on how to refreeze food or how to handle other problems, contact your local county extension office for a copy of "When the Home Freezer Stops," Pm-1367 or call Answer Line 1-800-262-3804.

Source: Patricia Redlinger, Extension Food Science Specialist, Iowa State University Extension

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