

# USDA Food Safety Tips for Areas Affected by Snow Storms

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The USDA YouTube video “[Food Safety During Power Outages](#)” has instructions for keeping frozen and refrigerated food safe. The publication “[A Consumer’s Guide to Food Safety: Severe Storms and Hurricanes](#)” can be downloaded and printed for reference during a power outage.

## Steps to follow if the power goes out:

- Keep appliance thermometers in both the refrigerator and the freezer to ensure temperatures remain food safe during a power outage. Safe temperatures are 40°F or lower in the refrigerator, 0°F or lower in the freezer.
- Freeze water in one-quart plastic storage bags or small containers prior to a storm. These containers are small enough to fit in around the food in the refrigerator and freezer to help keep food cold. Remember, water expands when it freezes so don’t overfill the containers.
- Freeze refrigerated items, such as leftovers, milk and fresh meat and poultry that you may not need immediately—this helps keep them at a safe temperature longer.
- Know where you can get dry ice or block ice.
- Have coolers on hand to keep refrigerator food cold if the power will be out for more than four hours.
- Group foods together in the freezer—this ‘igloo’ effect helps the food stay cold longer.
- Avoid putting food outside in ice or snow, because it attracts wild animals or could thaw when the sun comes out.
- Keep a few days’ worth of ready-to-eat foods that do not require cooking or cooling.
- Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible. A refrigerator will keep food cold for about 4 hours if the door is kept closed. A full freezer will hold its temperature for about 48 hours (24 hours if half-full).
- Place meat and poultry to one side of the freezer or on a tray to prevent cross contamination of thawing juices.
- Use dry or block ice to keep the refrigerator as cold as possible during an extended power outage. Fifty pounds of dry ice should keep a fully-stocked 18-cubic-feet freezer cold for two days.

## Steps to follow after a weather emergency:

- Check the temperature inside of your refrigerator and freezer. Discard any perishable food (such as meat, poultry, seafood, eggs or leftovers) that has been above 40°F for two hours or more.
- Check each item separately. Throw out any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture or feels warm to the touch.
- Check frozen food for ice crystals. The food in your freezer that partially or completely thawed may be safely refrozen if it still contains ice crystals or is 40°F or below.
- Never taste a food to decide if it’s safe.
- **When in doubt, throw it out.**

Videos detailing food safety information are available in English, Spanish and American Sign Language on FSIS’ YouTube channel, [www.youtube.com/USDAFoodSafety](http://www.youtube.com/USDAFoodSafety). An FSIS Public Service Announcement (PSA) illustrating practical food safety recommendations for handling and consuming foods stored in refrigerators and freezers during and after a power outage is available in 30- and 60-second versions at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/videos-psas/food-safety-public-service-announcements>. News organizations and power companies can obtain hard copy (Beta and DVD) versions of the PSA by contacting FSIS’ Food Safety Education Staff at (301) 344-4757.

Consumers with food safety questions can “Ask Karen,” the FSIS virtual representative available 24 hours a day at [www.AskKaren.gov](http://www.AskKaren.gov) or [m.AskKaren.gov](http://m.AskKaren.gov) on a smartphone. Mobile Ask Karen can also be downloaded from the Apple and Android app stores. Consumers can e-mail, chat with a live representative or call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline directly from the app. To use these features from Mobile Ask Karen, simply choose “Contact Us” from the menu. The live chat option and the toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854), are available in English and Spanish on weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET.