

# STEP FOUR: FOOD, MEDICINE, WATER AND SEWAGE



## FOODS AND MEDICINES

The motto to remember is: **IF IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT**. Contamination from water, heat, smoke and fumes can spoil foods and medicines, making them dangerous to consume. It is cheaper to replace the item than to jeopardize your health by taking a chance.

- **Refrigerated food:** Refrigerators keep food at 4 degrees C (40 degrees F). If the temperature inside the fridge has gone above that level, discard all the food. If you are unsure about the temperature, throw the food out. If your fridge was exposed to floodwaters, throw out the entire contents, including all meats, fresh fruit and vegetables.
- **Frozen food:** Frozen food is probably safe, unless the freezer was exposed to heat from a fire, to floodwaters or has been without power for an extended period. If you are unsure about the exposure, throw the food out.

If the electricity is off, keep the freezer closed. It has enough insulation to keep food frozen for up to three days without power.

It is considered safe to refreeze food that has partially thawed, if it still contains visible ice crystals. However, partial thawing and refreezing will reduce the quality of the food. Discard anything that has completely thawed, has reached a temperature above 4 degrees C (40 degrees F), or has questionable colour or odour.

- **Canned food:** Tinned goods should be good for consumption unless the can has bulged, is badly dented or has rusted – throw these ones out. All undamaged canned goods should be washed and disinfected if they have been exposed to flood waters or smoke. Food stored in glass jars that have been exposed to heat should be thrown out as seals may have been broken.
- **Medicine:** Check with a doctor or pharmacist before taking any medicine that may have been damaged or exposed to flood waters. Ask him or her about how to properly dispose of medicine.

## WATER SAFETY

Water very quickly becomes a precious and rare commodity following major disasters. It is a good idea to shut off the water supply until you hear from the proper authorities that it is safe for drinking. Shutting off the main water valve will isolate your water system, thereby eliminating loss of precious water and possible contamination from the public system. You can obtain safe water from undamaged water heaters or by melting ice cubes.

If you are on a well or cistern, and it has been flooded or damaged, assume that the water in your home is not safe to drink. You will probably need to disinfect the well or cistern, or have it repaired. Contact your public health inspector or local authority for instructions.

- **Water Purification:** Until your water has been confirmed safe for drinking, you have three options:
  - **Alternative water supply** – Obtain bottled water or water from another source that is known to be safe. This is the best choice.
  - **Boiling water** – Keep the water at a rolling boil for at least six minutes.
  - **Chlorination** – Disinfect water with **unscented** liquid chlorine bleach. Add the bleach to the water using an eyedropper bottle, and use the eyedropper bottle only for disinfecting. Thoroughly mix the bleach with the water and allow it to stand for 30 minutes. The water should then have a slight chlorine odour. If it doesn't, repeat the process and allow it to stand for another 30 minutes.

4.5 litres (1 gallon) of water to be treated	Drops of unscented liquid chlorine bleach
Clear water	8 drops
Cloudy water	16 drops

You can also purify water with chlorine tablets, available where camping supplies are sold. Follow the instructions on the container.

## SEWAGE DISPOSAL:

Do not use your sewage disposal system until you know it is capable of handling waste.

- **Sewer system** – If your home is connected to a municipal sewer, you will be notified when the system has been restored. As a temporary measure, you can line the toilet with a plastic trash can liner and dispose of the bag as necessary.
- **Septic system** – Septic tanks can be damaged by major disasters, although flooding does not seriously affect septic tanks. Avoid having the septic tank emptied if the ground is saturated. The surrounding water pressure may propel an empty tank out of the ground.
- **Outhouse** – Ensure that the outhouse is still positioned over the pit. If the outhouse has been washed away, or collapsed, cover the open pit with sturdy boards to prevent accidents and the spread of disease. If water is in the pit, add 2 litres (2 quarts) of unscented liquid chlorine bleach every three to four days until the water disappears.