

The Post Rock Connection
Post Rock Extension District #1 Family and Consumer Sciences Column
Month of May 2021
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Food Safety During Power Outages

Severe weather events like thunderstorms and tornadoes can bring down power lines in a neighborhood, or even entire grids of a city. When the power goes out, it's important to keep food safety in mind and remember the clock starts ticking on the viability of perishable foods in the refrigerator and freezer. When refrigerators and freezers lose power, the food inside can become susceptible to foodborne contaminants in just a few hours. The CDC and Ready.gov recommend the following tips to keep your food safe before, during, and after the power goes out.

BEFORE the power goes out: Keep appliance thermometers in your refrigerator and freezer. These are budget friendly tools that will determine if food is safe. The refrigerator should be at 40°F or below and the freezer should be at 0°F or below. Keep coolers, frozen containers of water and frozen gel packs on hand in case you have to remove your food from the refrigerator to keep it cold at 40°F or below. If you think the power will be out for a long time, buy dry ice or block ice to keep your food cold in the refrigerator.

DURING a power outage: Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed. If the doors stay closed, food will stay safe for up to 4 hours in a refrigerator and 48 hours in a full freezer; 24 hours in a half-full freezer. If the power has been out for 4 hours, put refrigerated perishable foods in a cooler with the frozen containers of water or gel packs to keep the food cold.

AFTER a power outage: Never taste food to determine if it is safe to eat. When in doubt, throw it out. Throw out perishable food in your refrigerator (meat, fish, cut fruits and vegetables, eggs, milk, and leftovers) after 4 hours without power or a cold source like dry ice. Throw out any food with an unusual odor, color, or texture. Check temperatures of food and throw out food that is warmer than 40° F. If you have an appliance thermometer in your freezer, check to see if it is still at 40 °F or below. You can safely refreeze or cook thawed frozen food that still contains ice crystals or is at 40 °F or below. Consuming unsafe, contaminated food is risky and could result in a foodborne illness.

The Post Rock District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith Counties. Contact Ashley at asvaty@ksu.edu or by calling 785-524-4432. Stay connected with “Post Rock Extension” on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. Our website is www.postrock.ksu.edu.



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