

Tips on Food and Drinking Water Safety

In the aftermath of a hurricane, polluted water is one of the most serious health risks. Assume your tap water is unsafe. Do not drink it until local authorities inform you it is safe to do so.

When figuring the amount of drinking water you'll need, a good rule of thumb is one gallon of drinking water per person per day. If you haven't put aside enough water for you and your family, relief workers may be able to provide some water. However, if you need water urgently, you can use the water in your water heater. First, turn off the power and open the valve at the bottom of the tank. You can also drink the water from your toilet's tank (NOT the bowl!).

Water Purification Methods

- Bring to a roiling boil for 5-10 minutes.
- Household bleach. Use only plain bleach which contains sodium hypochlorite as the only active ingredient. Do not use bleach with additives such as soap or lemon. Add eight drops per gallon of water or 16 drops per gallon of cloudy water. Mix thoroughly and let stand 30 minutes.
- 2% tincture of iodine, using 20 drops per gallon of clear water, or more if the water is cloudy.
- Water purification tablets, available from many pharmacies, follow the label instructions

Food Safety

If in doubt, throw it out!

- Don't eat anything you suspect of being spoiled. In a disaster cleanup, the last thing you want is to be ill from food poisoning. Remember to wash your hands often with purified water, and wash any body part that has been in contact with polluted water.
- Food in an unopened freezer should stay frozen for about two days. Save that food for last, and don't open the door until you have to.
- Food in a refrigerator without power will stay cool for several hours. Consume perishables first, such as dairy products and meat. Grill your meats if possible (outside!), because cooked meat stays edible longer than raw meat. Eat sparingly, and don't open the refrigerator unless necessary.
- If food begins to turn moldy or smell bad, throw it away