Flood Contaminated Foods

Contaminated food may be a problem following any storm involving flooding.

Flood waters may carry silt, raw sewage, oil, or chemical wastes. Filth and disease bacteria in flood water will contaminate food, making it unsafe to eat.

Thoroughly inspect any food left in the house after a flood. Flood water may have covered it, dripped on it, or seeped into it. Even though some foods (see below) are protected by their containers, if you are in doubt about the safety of a food, throw it out rather than risk sickness.

Use the following guidelines when deciding which foods to discard and which to save.

**Food to discard**

Do not attempt to save the following foods if there is any possibility that they come into contact with flood water:

1. Opened containers and packages which have come in contact with flood waters.
2. Unopened jars and bottles with paper, cork, or waxy seals such as those containing mayonnaise, or salad dressing, wine, or home canned foods.
3. Containers of spices, seasonings, and flavorings.
4. Flour, grains, sugar and coffee in canisters or bags.
5. Paper, cloth, fiber, or cardboard boxes, even if the contents seem dry. This includes salt, cereals, pasta products, rice, and any "sealed" packages of crackers, cookies or mixes, within a larger paper box.
6. Dented seams, bulging or rusty, leaking tin cans. Cans which have been tossed about and are found far from their normal storage spot or floating in flood water. Seams on these cans may have been weakened or their seals broken, causing contamination or spoilage.
7. Jam or jellies sealed with wax or paraffin.
8. Containers with non-sealed, fitted lids, such as cocoa or baking powder.
9. Commercially bottled or canned carbonated beverages, if the cap or top is crusted with silt.
10. Foil or cellophane packages.
11. All fresh vegetables and fruits which have been covered or exposed to flood waters. Even potatoes and apples that can be washed and peeled present a risk of bacterial contamination.
12. Fresh meat, fish, and poultry which have been in contact with flood waters.
13. Home canned foods even if the jar seems tightly sealed. (However, in some cases, tightly sealed home canned foods that were stored above the flood water may be safe, depending on the flood conditions.

**Food to keep**

Undamaged cans and glass containers of food are safe if you wash, sanitize containers, and cook foods before use. Do not eat raw fruit under any condition if it has been flooded, even if it has been sanitized.

**To disinfect cans and commercial glass jars**

All cans and commercial glass jars free of rust or dents must be washed and sanitized before they are opened.

1. Remove labels and wash in a strong detergent solution with a scrub brush. Remove all silt.
2. Immerse scrubbed containers for 15 minutes in cold (60-70°F) chlorine solution. Household bleaches contain from 2% to 6% chlorine. The amount of bleach to add to water would depend on the percent chlorine it contains:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| % chlorine in bleach | Volume of bleach to add to 1 quart water | Volume of bleach to add to 1 gallon water |
| 2% | 2 teaspoons | 2 Tablespoons |
| 4% | 1 teaspoon | 1 Tablespoon |
| 6% | ½ teaspoon | 1. teaspoons
 |

1. Remove containers from solution, and air-dry before opening. Re-label if possible. Use as soon as possible, since containers may rust. Store containers in a cool dry location where they will not be re-contaminated.