



## **Food Safety following an Emergency or Power Outage**

This fact sheet outlines how school canteens can assess food to determine whether or not it is safe to be eaten, following a power outage or emergency.

### **Be Prepared**

To protect food from potential emergency situations and power outages, schools should:

- Store food off the ground, move food and utensils to higher shelves in the event of heavy rain or flood warning.
- Ensure fridges and freezers have a strong seal, to help further preserve food.
- Keep a thermometer in fridges and freezers to monitor the temperature.

### **Power Outage**

Short power outages of less than an hour generally require little to no precautions. If the power is out for a longer period of time and food temperatures rise above or fall below a safe level, they need to be carefully assessed to determine whether or not they are safe.

School canteens should endeavour to store food at safe temperatures of below 5 degrees or above 60 degrees celsius.

Make note of the time power goes out. Keeping a thermometer in fridges and freezers at all times helps to assess food safety following a power outage.

Fridges - A closed refrigerator without power should remain cold (below the recommended 5 degrees) for approximately four hours. Only open doors if needed and do so quickly to help maintain the cool fridge temperature.

Food that is meant to be in the fridge, which has warmed for two hours or more, should be disposed of (this includes time it takes for the fridge to return to temperature once the power is back on). Blocks of hard cheese, margarine, fresh fruit, raw vegetables, most spreads and breads are an exception and is generally safe to consume if they have warmed for over two hours. Schools should assess these case-by-case and discard any items that appear spoiled.

Freezers - An unopened full freezer without power should keep food frozen for up to 48 hours. An unopened freezer which is half full should keep food frozen for up to 24 hours.

Food in the freezer should be assessed once the power has come back on, but before the freezer has had a chance to re-freeze the food. Otherwise it is impossible to determine the extent in which the food has thawed.

If food has thawed, it should not be re-frozen, but kept cold and eaten as soon as possible. Sealed juices and breads (including muffins, rolls and cakes) can generally be refrozen. Schools should assess these case-by-case and discard them if they appear spoiled.

Hot food – throw out food that was being cooked when the power went out, if cooking cannot be completed within two hours. If food is already fully cooked, this should be consumed within two hours.



After a Flood

Due to contaminants that flood waters can harbour, it is important for a school canteen to carefully assess which foods should be discarded to avoid the risk of illness. To determine what should be done with food and utensils that come into contact with floodwater, Healthy Kids Association would recommend the following:

Fresh fruit and vegetables	Discard
Jars, bottles, containers with lids, caps, seals etc.	Discard - Residue can get between the jar and lid/cap in spaces that are impossible to clean
Dented, swollen, rusted or damaged cans	Discard
Undamaged cans	Clean cans thoroughly by rinsing and scrubbing them in clean water, then sanitise in a solution of one tablespoon of chlorine bleach per two litres of hot water, for two minutes. Allow to air dry for at least an hour before opening or storing. Relabel cans, including the used-by date. Use as soon as possible.
Waterproof pouches (e.g. soups, sauces) without spouts or caps	Clean as above.
Boxes or other non-waterproof containers	Discard - This includes breads, unopened cereals, chips etc. Though the food is contained within a plastic bag, it cannot be assumed that the bag is waterproof, therefore the food must be considered contaminated.
Any other food that has come in to contact with floodwater that appears damaged or effected.	Discard
Counter tops, pots, pans and cookware.	Scrub clean with fresh water, then clean in a solution of one tablespoon of chlorine bleach in two litres of hot water.
All porous kitchen and cookware e.g. wooden, plastic, rubber	Discard – These cannot be adequately sanitised.
Silverware and metal utensils	Scrub and clean with fresh water, then boil in water for 10 minutes.
Glass, china and enamel-ware	Scrub clean with fresh water, then clean in a solution of one tablespoon of chlorine bleach in two litres of hot water.
Tea-towel and cloths	Discard – These cannot be adequately sanitised.

Wear gloves when working with bleach to avoid skin irritation.

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### After a Fire:

Toxic fumes from burning material are one of the main dangers for school canteens following a fire. This can include chemicals used to fight the fire. The heat from a fire can also cause bacteria in food to multiply, another area of concern for school canteens. Following a fire in the school canteen, Healthy Kids Association would recommend the following:

- Dispose of any food that was near the fire, even if it appears to be alright, including food in jars and cans.
- Dispose of any raw food, including but not limited to food packaged in cardboard, plastic wrap, jars and bottles.
- Dispose of all refrigerator food, as seals are not airtight, potentially exposing food to toxic fumes.
- Wash all cooking utensils exposed to fire-fighting chemicals in hot soapy water, then sanitise in one tablespoon of chlorine bleach per two litres of hot water and rinse.
- Dispose of all porous cooking utensils, as these cannot be adequately sanitised.

For further information, visit [www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au)



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**Healthy Kids' mission is to promote and influence healthy food choices for children**