



NEWS RELEASE

St. Charles County Government

Department of Community Health and the Environment

Gil Copley, Director

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 16, 2008

Cameron Satterfield, Public Information Officer

(636) 949-7408

Food Safety During Floods

St. Charles County, Missouri – As floodwaters continue to rise in parts of St. Charles County, the Department of Community Health and the Environment is keeping a close watch on health and safety issues for residents. Avoiding illness from tainted food, utensils, and drinking water is of vital importance. To help citizens prepare for and respond to this emergency, below is some important information from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services.

Residents should be extremely cautious with food and cooking utensils stored in flooded homes. These items can harbor dangerous bacteria like salmonella and listeria, which can cause potentially serious food-borne illnesses. People should not eat or drink anything that has come in contact with floodwater. The best advice is: *when in doubt, throw it out.*

Cans, bottles, jars or boxed items such as cereals, peanut butter, canned fruits and juices, bread products, fresh or raw fruits kept in cupboards and cabinets that are wet and received water damage should be discarded immediately. Any food that is not in a waterproof container should be discarded. This includes any food that has a screw-on cap, snap lids, pull tops, crimped caps (like soda bottles), and home canned foods. Food in cardboard containers such as infant formula and juice boxes should be also thrown away.

The only items that can be saved are commercially-prepared foods in metal cans or in retort pouches (such as those used for packaging tuna and juice drinks). Special care must be taken before opening these containers.

- Remove labels, if possible
- Wash the cans or pouches in hot soapy water, brushing away any dirt or silt, and then rinse them in clean water
- Sanitize the containers in one of two ways:
 1. Place in water and bring to a boil and boil for two minutes
 2. Place in a freshly-made solution of one tablespoon of unscented liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of drinking water for 15 minutes.
- Air-dry the cans or pouches for at least one hour before opening or storing.
- Use a marker to re-label cans.

Sight, smell, and taste are not accurate indicators of a food item's safety, since the bacteria that can cause illness cannot be seen, smelled, or tasted. Some foods may look and smell fine, but if they have been at room temperature longer than four hours, bacteria can grow and multiply rapidly. Some bacteria can produce toxins, which are not destroyed by cooking and can cause illness.

Floodwater can be toxic, so precautions need to be taken to prevent illness. Pots, pans, and any other dishes or utensils that have been exposed to floodwater should be washed in hot soapy water and then rinsed. Dishes and utensils should be further sanitized by boiling them in potable water for two minutes or immersing them in a solution of one tablespoon of unscented liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of potable water for 15 minutes. To clean countertops or other surfaces, wash them with hot soapy water and then rinse. Sanitize them with the water and bleach solution detailed above and let them air dry.

- MORE -



NEWS RELEASE

St. Charles County Government

Department of Community Health and the Environment

Gil Copley, Director

Refrigerators and freezers that experienced extended power outages and that contained food that it was necessary to discard should be cleaned and sanitized prior to restocking. Wash the interiors of the units with warm soapy water, rinse with clear water and then wipe the units' inside surfaces with a cloth or sponge dipped in a mild bleach solution made by mixing one capful of plain chlorine bleach in a gallon of potable water. Allow to air dry and restock the units when they can maintain food at safe temperatures of 41°F or less.

Keep an appliance thermometer in your refrigerator and freezer at all times to see if food is being stored at safe temperatures (34°F to 45°F for the refrigerator; 0°F or below for the freezer). The key to determining the safety of foods in the refrigerator and freezer is how cold they are. Bacteria multiply rapidly at temperatures above 41°F.

Discard any perishable food that has been above 41°F for four hours or more and any food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture. If food was not out of temperature for four hours or more, it should be safe to consume.

A full freezer should keep food safe about two days; a half-full freezer for about a day. Adding bags of ice or dry ice to the freezer will help maintain foods at safe temperatures. You can safely refreeze thawed foods that still contain ice crystals or feel cold to the touch, however the food may suffer some quality loss in flavor and texture.

Contact your health care provider or local health agency to report any symptoms you or your family are experiencing which you feel are related to consuming spoiled food. Some signs and symptoms of food-borne illness include stomach cramping, nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, and headache. While most food-borne illness resolves itself in a few days, it can become serious and even life threatening for young children, senior adults, and people with weakened immune systems. With food-borne illness, as with any kind of illness, if symptoms persist or worsen, your health care provider should be contacted.

For more information about the St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment, call (636) 949-7400 or visit www.scchealth.org.

#