

Health Tips

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Student Health Services

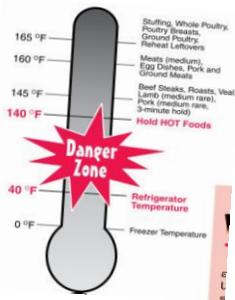
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This month's Health Tips is going to focus on food safety and stormy weather. With what has been happening in many unfortunate areas of the country, it is worthwhile to go over a few helpful tips on what to do with food after the power has been lost. Here, in New England, we face the loss of power due to hurricanes, tropical storms, **and** winter blizzards- fortunately, in most New England areas, flooding is far less likely.



Traditionally, we talk about “critical” food temperature zones. This is the range between 41 and 140 degrees; the temperature at which bacteria like to grow. Hot food should be kept at above 140 degrees and cold food should be kept at less than 41 degrees. Now, this does not apply to cooked internal temperatures. What we are talking about is “holding” temperatures. To properly kill bacteria, cooked foods must reach a certain internal temperature to be considered safe. This minimal temperature can vary depending on the type of food, but a good number to remember, if you want to play it safe, is 165 degrees. A good link to go to is this: [Safe Food Temperatures](#)



The typical refrigerator has several types of items stored in it: cooked foods, raw foods, and condiments/beverages as well as frozen food items. Ideally the temperature in your refrigerator should be below 40 degrees but above 32 degrees (unless you like your milk frozen!). Freezers should ideally be at or below 0 degrees. With this in mind, there are a number of things that you can do to make sure your food will stay safe during a storm and its subsequent loss of power. Although they can sometimes get in the way- knocked over or fall out- you really should have thermometers in your refrigerator and freezer. That is the only reliable way to know if your foods are being kept safe for you to eat. The “sniff and taste” test just doesn't work- just as raising a wet finger to tell the air temperature doesn't work. You will only know if it's very hot or very cold- something you know, already. If food is really bad- you will know the smell- but, if it's still not safe to consume, your nose and sense of taste is just too unreliable – as are your eyes! Was that cheese supposed to have green-black spots?



So what should you do if a storm is coming that could affect the power? Make sure your refrigerator is at or below 40 degrees- maybe even lower the temperature a little so that it's more in the 30s. Also, placing containers of ice in the refrigerator would help (or ice packs). The same goes for your freezer; try to bring it below 0 degrees and place extra ice or ice packs in there. Freezing leftovers, rather than keeping them in the refrigerator may also help preserve the food. The more frozen items you have in your freezer, the better. If you're in an area where the power frequently goes out- then plan ahead. Filling a cooler with ice and placing those things you use commonly- such as beverages, what you're planning on having for lunch, and some common condiments – will save your having to open the refrigerator when the power has gone out.

A rule of thumb is that a refrigerator will keep most food cold for about 4 hours – perhaps a little longer if there was ice/ice packs and the door is not opened. A full freezer will keep foods frozen for ~ 48 hours and a half full for ~ 24 hours.

What do you do when the power comes back on? If refrigerated food has been kept above 40 degrees for more than 2 hours- and even less if that temperature is 90 degrees or so, then it must be discarded. Milk, meats, fish, poultry, soft cheeses, leftovers are particularly susceptible to spoilage. Subsequently cooking them at adequate temperature may still not reduce your risk. So, look at the thermometer to see what it displays.



Frozen food can be refrozen if there are still ice crystals present and it has been kept below 40 degrees. This, however, does not necessarily mean that the texture and taste quality will be as good. The adage of “When in doubt throw it out” best applies in this situation.

So, the important thing to remember when bad weather is on the way, is to plan ahead.

Refrigerators and freezers are designed to hold foods at the ideal temperatures. Placing frozen foods in a cooler and placing the cooler outside sounds reasonable –if it’s a blizzard; however, the air temperature is rarely as cold as the “air” temperature in a freezer and contamination of your food from other things in the air can occur. Also, when the sun comes out, but the power is still not on, it can bring up the temperature of your thought-to-be protected items a lot quicker than you thought.

A good resource, and the source of much of this information is: [A Consumer's Guide to Food Safety](#)

Be well.....Be safe,

Health Services at BCC