



# Food safety after a flood

**TN:** There are two logos at the top of the page. On the left is: Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa New Zealand Government. On the right is: Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand.

**Adapted in 2023 by Accessible Formats Service, Blind Low Vision NZ, Auckland**

## Food safety after a flood

### Don't eat food that's been in contact with floodwaters

- Floodwaters can be contaminated with sewage; bacteria, viruses, and parasites; chemical contaminants such as pesticides, heavy metals, and petroleum products; and physical contaminants such as glass and debris.
- Because of this, do not consume any food that has been in contact with floodwaters. Throw away all contaminated food including items in twist-top bottles or

stored in containers (apart from tins). If in doubt, throw it out.

- Wash unopened, undamaged tins thoroughly in clean, soapy water before you open and use them. Dry them thoroughly if they're being stored so they don't rust. Discard tins that are deeply dented, particularly around the seams, or heavily rusted.
- Place food waste in bin bags to avoid attracting rats, mice, and flies.
- If you are given food, make sure you know where it comes from and that the donated food has not been in contact with floodwaters.

## **Power failures: What to do with the food in your fridge and freezer**

When the power goes out, here's what to do to avoid getting sick from unsafe food:

- Eat foods that will expire soon first—such as bread, meat, salads, and dairy products.
- During the power failure, keep your fridge/freezer closed as much as possible to help keep it cooler for longer. Unopened fridges should hold their temperature for 4 hours.
- Freezers will remain colder for longer if they are full (2-4 days) compared to if they are half full (1-2 days). So, leave already frozen food in the freezer if possible.

- Eat your canned and non-perishable pantry foods last.

## **Refreezing food**

Once the power is back on, check the food in your freezer:

- If the food is still visibly frozen (for example, if it still has ice crystals on it) and the packaging isn't damaged or open, you can safely refreeze it.
- If the food has thawed, you should not refreeze it.
- You can still keep or use thawed food if it has not started to look or smell bad. Keep it cold (like in the fridge) until you are ready to eat or cook it.

## **Produce from your garden**

- If you have a vegetable patch or fruit trees, do not eat vegetables or fruit submerged by, or even splashed by, floodwater.
- Clean up and remove debris from your garden and sprinkle it with garden lime to sanitise the area. Lime is available from a garden shop. Follow the label instructions, especially warnings and cautions.
- Produce that has been damaged only by rain, and which has not come into contact with any floodwater, should be safe to eat once washed.

# Focus on hygiene when preparing and cooking food

Maintaining hygiene around food preparation and cooking is essential to keep you and your whānau healthy.

- Always wash your hands and, if possible, dry them before preparing food—if water is in short supply, keep some in a bowl with disinfectant. Use hand sanitiser if no handwashing facilities are available.
- Ensure all kitchen utensils and food-preparation surfaces are clean before and after use.
- Cook food thoroughly.

## Collecting kai moana (seafood)

- Avoid collecting live seafood from the ocean for several days after any large-storm events due to the increased risk of contamination from storm water runoff or overflows from sewerage systems.
- Do not gather any dead fish or shellfish that have washed up on beaches, no matter how fresh they may look, as they can contain harmful bacteria.

## For more information

[www.mpi.govt.nz/funding-rural-support/adverse-events/food-safety-in-natural-disasters-and-emergencies/](http://www.mpi.govt.nz/funding-rural-support/adverse-events/food-safety-in-natural-disasters-and-emergencies/)

Food safety is just one step in staying safe during and after an emergency.

Civil Defence has more information on what to do. Visit [www.civildefence.govt.nz/](http://www.civildefence.govt.nz/)

**End of Food safety after a flood**