



Iowa Department of Public Health Division of Environmental Health

Flood Contaminated Foods

Overview: Food contamination is often a problem after a flood because flood water can carry mud, raw sewage, chemicals, and fuel. Filth and disease-causing bacteria can contaminate any food the water contacts and make that food unsafe to eat. This fact sheet provides guidance on food salvage.

Most metal cans can be salvaged. Examine cans carefully.

Metal cans of food that are free of dents and rust can be saved if the following steps are followed:

- Remove the labels and re-label with a permanent marker.
- Wash the unopened cans in a strong dish detergent solution.
- Use a brush to remove all silt and dirt.
- Immerse the scrubbed containers in a lukewarm solution of one tablespoon of bleach in one gallon of clean water.
- Allow the cans to thoroughly air dry before opening or storing.

Discard Damaged Foods.

Discard the following foods if flood water has covered, dripped on, or seeped into the package:

- Containers of nuts, spices, seasonings, and flavorings
- Canisters or bags of grains, flour, sugar, salt, coffee, and tea.
- Food in paper, plastic, cloth, fiber, or cardboard packages even if the packages seem dry (i.e., pasta, cereal, crackers, baking mixes).
- Jars or bottles of food that have screw-top or crimp-topped lids. This includes virtually all home-canned and commercially canned foods in glass jars.

Fresh foods should ALWAYS be discarded.

All fresh vegetables and fruits, and fresh meat, fish, and poultry that have been in contact with flood waters must be discarded.

Discard porous non-food items that come into contact with foods.

Any porous items that are used with food or come in contact with the mouth should be discarded. This includes:

- Plastic baby bottles, nipples, and pacifiers.
- Plastic storage containers.
- Wooden bowls.
- Disposable silverware.
- Plastic utensils.
- Paper, foam, or plastic dishes.

Clean non-porous dishes thoroughly.

Glass and china dishes, metal and glass cookware, glass baby bottles, and empty canning jars can be saved.

- Wash in a strong dish detergent solution; remove all filth and mud.
- Disinfect china and glass dishes, metal pots, pans, and utensils, and silverware in a solution of one tablespoon of bleach in one gallon of clean water.