

## PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

No. 100.1

### *FOOD SAFETY DURING POWER OUTAGES*

---

#### FAST FACTS

- Keep your refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.
- A closed refrigerator should keep your food cool for 4 to 6 hours.
- A closed, full freezer should keep your food frozen for up to 48 hours, while a half full freezer should keep your food frozen for up to 24 hours.
- If food is warm for longer than 4 hours, throw the food out.

#### WHAT TO DO DURING A POWER OUTAGE

- Record the time the power outage starts, so you know how long your food has been without refrigeration.
- Keep your refrigeration and freezer doors closed as much as possible. Only open fridge and freezer doors when absolutely necessary – this will keep the food and air temperature colder for longer.
- Place refrigerated food together to keep food cool/colder longer.
- Place meat, poultry or fish in the coldest section of your refrigerator, making sure it doesn't drip onto fresh fruit and vegetables or other ready to eat foods.
- If necessary, use ice to help keep the food cold.

#### HOW LONG WILL MY FOOD STAY COLD?

- A closed refrigerator should keep your food cool for 4 – 6 hours.
- Kept closed, a full freezer should keep your food frozen for up to 48 hours, while a half full freezer should keep your food frozen for up to 24 hours.
- The rate of thawing depends on the:
  - amount of food in the freezer. A full freezer stays colder than one that is partially full.
  - temperature of the food. The colder the food, the longer it will stay frozen.
  - size and insulation of the freezer.

#### IF COOKING WAS INTERRUPTED BY POWER FAILURE

- Discard food that was being cooked when the power outage started.
- In the case of properly cooled hot food, eat it within 4 hours or throw it out.
- Do not put hot food in your refrigerator or freezer. Without power, this will cause the refrigerator or freezer to warm up much faster.

### **WHAT TO DO WHEN THE POWER COMES BACK ON**

If the power is restored within 4 to 6 hours and your refrigerator/freezer doors have remained closed, some of your food may still be suitable for use. You should use a thermometer to check whether:

- The temperature of food in the freezer is 0°C or lower, or if ice crystals are visible in the food. If so the food can be re-frozen, otherwise throw out.

### **IF THE FOOD IN THE FRIDGE IS ABOVE 5 °C:**

- for less than two hours, you can re-refrigerate or use the food immediately
- for between 2 and 4 hours, the food can be used, but you must use it immediately
- for longer than 4 hours, you must throw the food out

Appearance or smell is not a reliable indicator of food safety. Some foods may look and smell fine, but if they have been warm too long, they may contain enough bacteria to make people ill. You should discard any food that has an obvious strange colour or odour.

If raw food – especially meat, poultry and fish thaw and drip juices, clean and disinfect all affected areas in the fridge or freezer, as well as any countertops, cutting boards and utensils that have been affected.

### ***IF IN DOUBT – THROW IT OUT***

### **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

Business hours: Contact the Environmental Health hotline on 1800 095 646

After hours: Contact the Power and Water Corporation hotline on 1800 245 090

fact sheet