

# FOOD SAFETY for Residents

Minimising the risks of food  
contamination after a disaster.

PLAN. PREPARE. SURVIVE.

**Food that has come in contact with contaminated flood or storm water or that has not been refrigerated for a period of time can be a risk for you and your family following a disaster. It is important that you take action to prevent your family from becoming ill.**

## Identify and throw out any unsafe food

**Throw out food that may be off or exposed to unsafe water:**

- food that has an unusual odour, colour or texture
- any food that has come in contact with flood or storm water.

**Throw out food from the fridge or freezer:**

- any refrigerated food that has been left unrefrigerated or above 5°C for more than four hours.

**Note** – Cooking at-risk food will NOT eliminate the risk of food borne illness. At risk foods are food items that have been at a temperature between 5°C and 60°C for more than 4 hours. As some bacteria multiply, they produce a toxin which is not destroyed at the temperature used to cook/reheat foods.

- frozen food that has thawed and been above a temperature of 5°C for more than 4 hours.

**Note** – If food has been partially thawed, the food should be eaten as soon as possible (as long as it has not come into contact with flood or storm water).

**Throw out food in certain containers:**

- food containers with screw or twist caps, snap lids, crimped caps (soft drink bottles) and flip tops that have come into contact with flood or storm water
- canned food where can is open, swollen or damaged, or has a missing or damaged label.

**Note** – commercially canned foods that are sealed, not bulging or dented may be safe. It is recommended that you remove the label, thoroughly wash the outside of the can with drinking quality water (hot if possible), sanitise with household chlorine bleach (refer to the information below) and relabel the can with the product name and expiry or best before date.

**If in doubt, throw it out**

The golden rule to remember is that if you are unsure if a food item is safe to eat, be cautious and throw it out. It is better to be safe than become ill from unsafe food.

**While the power is out**

Keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible.

Use eskies with ice to keep food cold (if available).



### Cleaning and sanitising food areas and equipment

All surfaces, benchtops, shelving, inside cupboards, equipment and utensils that have been in contact with flood or stormwater should be thoroughly cleaned and then sanitised before being reused. Non-electrical pieces of kitchen equipment should be dismantled and properly cleaned and sanitised. Soiled tea towels should be discarded.

Clean items and surfaces with warm, soapy water, removing all physical debris. Items can then be sanitised by:

- soaking in boiling water; or
- using a commercial sanitiser following the manufacturer's instructions; or
- using water containing bleach. You must use an appropriate method of water to bleach ratio, which will vary depending on the temperature of the water used and the type of bleach (household or commercial). As a general guide, immerse items in a solution of 1 tablespoon of household chlorine bleach per 2 litres of warm water, then rinse with drinking quality water.

Remember to wash your hands after handling contaminated food or touching contaminated surfaces. Wear gloves and don't touch your mouth or face when cleaning up after a flood or storm.

### Throw out items that cannot be sanitised

In some cases, equipment and utensils may need to be thrown out because they cannot be sanitised. This includes:

- any damaged or cracked items
- items made from porous materials such as wood, plastic or rubber (including wooden chopping boards).

Baby bottle nipples and pacifiers should also be thrown out.

### Disposing of your food products

In a large disaster event, Council may provide a designated disposal site for the public to dispose of food wastes to prevent any odour or vermin issues. If this is the case, Council will advise residents through the radio, or via Council's Disaster Dashboard at [disaster.townsville.qld.gov.au](https://disaster.townsville.qld.gov.au).

### More information

More information on disaster preparation can be found on our website at [townsville.qld.gov.au](https://townsville.qld.gov.au) on the Disaster Management page.

Council's Disaster Dashboard - [disaster.townsville.qld.gov.au](https://disaster.townsville.qld.gov.au).