

What You Need to Know When the Power Goes Out

Food Safety

If the power is out for less than 2 hours, then the food in your refrigerator and freezer will be safe to consume. While the power is out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to keep food cold for longer.

If the power is out for longer than 2 hours, follow the guidelines below:

- For the Freezer section: A freezer that is half full will hold food safely for up to 24 hours. A full freezer will hold food safely for 48 hours. Do not open the freezer door if you can avoid it.
- For the Refrigerated section: Pack milk, other dairy products, meat, fish, eggs, gravy, and spoilable leftovers into a cooler surrounded by ice. Inexpensive Styrofoam coolers are fine for this purpose.
- Use a digital quick-response thermometer to check the temperature of your food right before you cook or eat it. Throw away any food that has a temperature of more than 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

Safe Drinking Water

When power goes out, water purification systems may not be functioning fully. Safe water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene includes bottled, boiled, or treated water. Your state or local health department can make specific recommendations for boiling or treating water in your area. Here are some general rules concerning water for drinking, cooking, and personal hygiene.

Remember:

- Do not use contaminated water to wash dishes, brush your teeth, wash and prepare food, wash your hands, make ice, or make baby formula. If possible, use baby formula that does not need to have water added. You can use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer to wash your hands.
- If you use bottled water, be sure it came from a safe source. If you do not know that the water came from a safe source, you should boil or treat it before you use it. Use only bottled, boiled, or treated water until your supply is tested and found safe.
- Boiling water, when practical, is the preferred way to kill harmful bacteria and parasites. Bringing water to a rolling boil for 1 minute will kill most organisms. When boiling water is not practical, you can treat water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or unscented household chlorine bleach (5.25% sodium hypochlorite):
 - ◇ If you use chlorine tablets or iodine tablets, follow the directions that come with the tablets.
 - ◇ If you use household chlorine bleach, add 1/8 teaspoon (~0.75 mL) of bleach per gallon of water if the water is clear. For cloudy water, add 1/4 teaspoon (~1.50 mL) of bleach per gallon. Mix the solution thoroughly and let it stand for about 30 minutes before using it.
 - ◇ Note: Treating water with chlorine tablets, iodine tablets, or liquid bleach will not kill parasitic organisms.

Use a bleach solution to rinse water containers before reusing them. Use water storage tanks and other types of containers with caution. For example, fire truck storage tanks and previously used cans or bottles may be contaminated with microbes or chemicals. Do not rely on untested devices for decontaminating water.

Extreme Heat

Be aware of yours and others' risk for heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps and fainting. To avoid heat stress, you should:

- Drink a glass of fluid every 15 to 20 minutes and at least one gallon each day.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine. They both dehydrate the body.
- Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- Take frequent cool showers or baths.
- If you feel dizzy, weak, or overheated, go to a cool place. Sit or lie down, drink water, and wash your face with cool water. If you don't feel better soon, get medical help quickly.
- Work during cooler hours of the day when possible, or distribute the workload evenly throughout the day.

Heat stroke is the most serious heat illness. It happens when the body can't control its own temperature and its temperature rises rapidly. Sweating fails and the body cannot cool down. Body temperature may rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency care is not given. Warning signs of heat stroke vary but can include:

- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness, nausea, confusion, or unconsciousness
- An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F)

If you suspect someone has heat stroke, follow these instructions:

- Immediately call for medical attention.
- Get the person to a cooler area.
- Cool the person rapidly by immersing him/her cool water or a cool shower, or spraying or sponging him/her with cool water. If the humidity is low, wrap the person in a cool, wet sheet and fan him/her vigorously.
- Monitor body temperature and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101-102°F.
- Do not give the person alcohol to drink. Get medical assistance as soon as possible.
- If emergency medical personnel do not arrive quickly, call the hospital emergency room for further instructions.

Extreme Cold

Hypothermia happens when a person's core body temperature is lower than 35°C (95°F). Hypothermia has three levels: acute, subacute, or chronic.

- Acute hypothermia is caused by a rapid loss of body heat, usually from immersion in cold water.
- Subacute hypothermia often happens in cool outdoor weather (below 10°C or 50°F) when wind chill, wet or too little clothing, fatigue, and/or poor nutrition lower the body's ability to cope with cold.
- Chronic hypothermia happens from ongoing exposure to cold indoor temperatures (below 16°C or 60°F). The poor, the elderly, people who have hypothyroidism, people who take sedative-hypnotics, and drug and alcohol abusers are prone to chronic hypothermia, and they typically:
 - ◇ misjudge cold
 - ◇ move slowly
 - ◇ have poor nutrition
 - ◇ wear too little clothing
 - ◇ have poor heating system

Causes of Hypothermia:

- Cold temperatures
- Improper clothing, shelter, or heating
- Wetness
- Fatigue, exhaustion
- Poor fluid intake (dehydration)
- Poor food intake
- Alcohol intake

Preventing Hypothermia:

- Everyone, especially the elderly and ill, should have adequate food, clothing, shelter, and sources of heat.
- Blankets can help, even in poorly heated rooms.
- Wear layers of clothing and a hat, which help to keep in body heat.
- Move around. Physical activity raises body temperature.

Water cooler than 75°F (24°C) removes body heat more rapidly than can be replaced. The result is hypothermia.

To avoid hypothermia:

- Avoid swimming or wading in water if possible.
- If entering water is necessary:
- Wear high rubber boots in water.
- Ensure clothing and boots have adequate insulation.
- Avoid working/playing alone.
- Take frequent breaks out of the water.
- Change into dry clothing when possible.

Helping Someone Who Is Hypothermic:

As the body temperature decreases, the person will be less awake and aware and may be confused and disoriented. Because of this, even a mildly hypothermic person might not think to help himself/herself.

- Even someone who shows no signs of life should be brought quickly and carefully to a hospital or other medical facility.
- Do not rub or massage the skin.
- People who have severe hypothermia must be carefully rewarmed and their temperatures must be monitored.
- Do not use direct heat or hot water to warm the person.
- Give the person warm beverages to drink.
- Do not give the person alcohol or cigarettes. Blood flow needs to be improved, and these slow blood flow.

Preventing Carbon Monoxide Poisoning After an Emergency

Generators, grills, camp stoves, or other gasoline, propane, natural gas, or charcoal-burning devices should never be used inside a home, basement, garage or camper – or even outside near an open window.

Every home should have at least one working carbon monoxide detector. The detector's batteries should be checked twice annually, at the same time smoke detector batteries are checked. Carbon monoxide (CO) is an odorless, colorless gas that can cause sudden illness and death if inhaled.

When power outages occur during emergencies such as hurricanes or winter storms, the use of alternative sources of fuel or electricity for heating, cooling, or cooking can cause CO to build up in a home, garage, or camper and to poison the people and animals inside.

Every year, more than 500 people die in the U. S. from accidental CO poisoning.

CO is found in combustion fumes, such as those produced by small gasoline engines, stoves, generators, lanterns, and gas ranges, or by burning charcoal and wood. CO from these sources can build up in enclosed or partially enclosed spaces. People and animals in these spaces can be poisoned and can die from breathing CO.

How to Recognize CO Poisoning

Exposure to CO can cause loss of consciousness and death. The most common symptoms of CO poisoning are headache, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion. People who are sleeping or who have been drinking alcohol can die from CO poisoning before ever having symptoms.

Important CO Poisoning Prevention Tips

- Never use a gas range or oven to heat a home.
- Never use a charcoal grill, hibachi, lantern, or portable camping stove inside a home, tent, or camper.
- Never run a generator, pressure washer, or any gasoline-powered engine inside a basement, garage, or other enclosed structure, even if the doors or windows are open, unless the equipment is professionally installed and vented. Keep vents and flues free of debris, especially if winds are high. Flying debris can block ventilation lines.
- Never run a motor vehicle, generator, pressure washer, or any gasoline-powered engine outside an open window, door, or vent where exhaust can vent into an enclosed area.
- Never leave the motor running in a vehicle parked in an enclosed or partially enclosed space, such as a garage.
- If conditions are too hot or too cold, seek shelter with friends or at a community shelter.
- If CO poisoning is suspected, consult a health care professional right away.