

Food safety in a power cut - advice for consumers

How to avoid food poisoning and food waste during a power cut or power outage at home.

If a power cut has affected your home and your electricity supply has been cut off, it's important you continue to store and prepare food safely.

If the power outage is for less than 4 hours this is unlikely to impact the safety or quality of food.

How to store food safely following a power cut

If the power cut is for longer than 4 hours, here are some steps you can take to keep your food safe.

Keep fridge and freezer doors closed as much as possible

Your fridge should stay cold for up to 4 hours. The food in your freezer should stay frozen for up to 48 hours in a full freezer (or 24 hours if it's half full), but these are estimates. Fridge and freezer temperatures will vary depending on their make and model. The ambient room temperature at the time of the power cut will also affect this.

Use a fridge thermometer so you can tell if the fridge has become too warm

In normal circumstances, we recommend keeping fridges at 5°C or below but in power cuts, food can be stored in fridges at temperatures under 8°C. If the temperature rises to 8°C and above, you should eat food that normally requires refrigeration within 4 hours. Please see [our chilling advice](#) for more information.

Store food outside (if it's cold)

If the weather is cold (below 8°C), you can store food outside. Store food in clean dry conditions, out of direct sunlight and protect it from animals. You should use a sealed box to prevent contamination and tampering.

Save tinned foods for later

Food that is normally stored at ambient temperature will continue to be safe to eat. Some foods such as tinned foods will be safe to eat without heating through. Please see [our Home Food Fact Checker](#) for more advice on eating canned foods.

How to prepare and cook food during a power cut

If you have an electric oven, you may need to find other ways to cook food safely.

Cooking with gas

Electric cookers will not work during a power cut, but gas cookers are more likely to function. You can also cook food and heat water for food preparation and cleaning using a camping stove, barbecue, or bottled gas stove. Please check the manufacturer's instructions for safe use of these appliances. BBQs should not be used indoors.

Please note that cooking with these appliances can take longer than conventional cooking, so you need to make sure that food is [steaming hot and cooked through](#).

[Our BBQ food safety page](#) has tips on cooking food safely on a barbecue or camping stove.

Cleaning and avoiding cross-contamination

It is important that you cook, handle, and prepare your food properly. This includes washing your hands before touching food and [cleaning work surfaces and utensils](#). You can use alcohol-based hand sanitiser for cleaning your hands if the water supply is also cut off.

Continue to keep raw and cooked foods separate to [avoid cross-contamination](#).

Eat chilled foods first and reduce food waste

Chilled foods first need to be kept below 8°C to keep them safe.

These can include:

- Foods with a [use-by date](#), such as pre-packaged prepared foods that are 'ready-to-eat' like sandwiches, salads, and cooked meats
- Products that say 'keep refrigerated' on the label
- Meals you have cooked and will not serve immediately

If the fridge temperature has reached 8°C or above, these foods should be discarded after 4 hours (unless the power is restored within 4 hours).

To keep food safe and reduce food waste, use foods in the following order:

1. foods that need refrigeration
2. defrosted frozen food that doesn't need cooking
3. room-temperature perishable food
4. room-temperature canned, bottled, and dried food

Any foods that need refrigeration that you have not had time to eat could be shared with your neighbours if they have been stored correctly.

Protect people who are vulnerable to illness

Some people are at increased risk of [food poisoning](#). These can include young children, older people and people with an underlying health condition. For these people, extra caution should be taken to ensure food safety.

Preparing infant formula following a power cut

To prepare infant formula safely, you will need to be able to boil water. Please see the [NHS's guidance on the safe preparation of infant formula](#). If you are not able to boil water, use ready-to-use infant formula.

Important

This advice is for consumers in a domestic setting. If you are a business, you should [contact the food safety team at your local authority](#) for advice.