FOOD SAFETY AFTER A FLOOD

This fact sheet provides tips for protecting yourself and your family from food-borne illness after a flood.

Arizona Department of Health Services

UNPACKAGED FOODS

Do not eat any food that may have come in contact with flood water.

Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water.

Discard all fresh or processed meat (except when in hermetically/airtight sealed cans), cheese, eggs, dairy, and poultry products.

Discard all dried bulk foods, grains, beans, nuts, dried fruits, dried milk, and dried egg products.

SEALED FOIL OR CELLOPHANE AND PAPER PACKAGED FOODS

Discard any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with flood water, including those with screw caps and lids.

Food products in sealed foil, cellophane, or paper packages (e.g. candy, cereals, crackers, bread, chewing gum, and shelled nuts) that were stored above flood level are often damaged by condensation. Examine all containers for leaks, breaks, or other signs of damage. Discard any damaged food products.

Discard cardboard juice, milk, and baby formula boxes if they have come in contact with flood water because they cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized.

Discard food that is normally finely divided (e.g. powdered or granulated) but is found caked or clumped after a flood.

Discard any food packages that have stains on the inner paper wrapper, even if the outer foil package looks undamaged.

FROZEN FOODS

Discard all food products inside a refrigerator or freezer if they were contaminated by flood waters.

If the inside of the refrigerator or freezer was not contaminated by flood waters, then food might be salvaged and refrozen if:

- The products remained at, or below, 41°F at all times.
- If the food is only partially thawed and still has ice crystals. Note: the quality of these products may be impacted by refreezing.
- Completely thawed foods, including fruits, vegetables, meats, poultry, fish, shellfish, and cooked food, should not be refrozen.
- Any vacuum packed fish that is no longer frozen should be discarded.

When in doubt, throw it out!

CANNED AND GLASS PACKAGED FOODS

Discard any home canned foods if they have come in contact with flood water.

Discard any canned food product that has evidence of rust, leaks, swelling, or broken/dented seams.

Discard glass containers with porous, screw top type closures of paper or fiber (e.g. mayonnaise, mustard, pickles, and baby food) because they cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized.

Food from glass containers that have crimped caps (e.g. bottled water and soft drinks) should be discarded.

Place canned and glass packaged foods in separate piles, by food type, to help with identification after the labels are removed for cleaning and sanitizing. Use these cans as soon as possible, after cleaning and sanitizing, as they may rust over time.

All other canned and glass packaged foods can be washed and rinsed using potable water and detergent. After cleaning, submerge containers in a chlorine sanitizer solution made by mixing one (1) tablespoon of household bleach (must be unscented and have 5% available chlorine) with one (1) gallon of potable water. Keep containers submerged for at least fifteen (15) minutes. Allow containers to air dry before using.

If the safety of a food product cannot be determined, it is best to throw it out.

Do not rely on odor or taste to assess the safety of a food product.

Dispose all food in plastic bags and ensure they are subsequently sealed to prevent access by insects or rodents.

Remember, flood waters are heavily contaminated with disease organisms.

AGENCY	RESOURCES	WEBSITE
USDA (US Department of Agriculture)	Food Safety and Inspection Service	www.fsis.usda.gov
CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)	Food Safety Resources	www.cdc.gov/foodsafety
FDA (Food and Drug Administration)	Food Safety After A Flood	http://www.fda.gov/food/resourcesforyou/consumers/ucm076993.htm
ADHS (Arizona Department of Health Services)	Flood Safety	http://www.azdhs.gov/phs/oeh/extreme/floods/