

Food handling during a crisis situation.

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DURING OR FOLLOWING A DISASTER, HOMES AND BUSINESSES MAY BE INACCESSIBLE, DESTROYED OR UNINHABITABLE. PEOPLE DISPLACED FROM THEIR HOMES NEED TEMPORARY LIVING QUARTERS WHERE THEY MAY REST, EAT, SLEEP, ATTEND TO PERSONAL HYGIENE AND RECEIVE SECURITY. IT WILL ALSO BE NECESSARY TO PROVIDE FOOD WHILE DISPLACED PERSONS AND VOLUNTEER WORKERS ARE WORKING TO PROTECT AND RECLAIM HOMES AND BUSINESSES. THESE FEEDING SITES ALLOW THE RESCUE WORK TO CONTINUE AT AN UNINTERRUPTED PACE AND FOR THE WORKERS TO MAINTAIN PHYSICAL HEALTH.

Food Preparation

Foods being served at a disaster-feeding site need to be of limited preparation (meaning cooking or processing in a few steps and in a short period of time – less than four hours). It is best if the foods are designed to be served straight from the package, served cold (45°F or below) or cooked and served immediately while still hot (135°F or above).

Potentially Hazardous Foods

Special considerations must be given to certain food items – those considered to be potentially hazardous – because of their ability to support rapid and progressive growth of disease-causing bacteria. These food items are normally high in protein and moisture, such as products made with beef, pork, poultry, eggs, fish and milk; however, cooked vegetables, cut melons, rice and baked potatoes are also potentially hazardous and need special consideration.

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The main special considerations for potentially hazardous foods are time and temperature controls. All cooked foods must be cooked to the following internal temperatures: Pork-145°F; Poultry-165°F; Ground Beef-155°F; all others-140°F

Potentially hazardous foods must also receive special temperature treatment while being held in storage prior to cooking. If they are not packaged in hermetically sealed (air-tight) containers, they must be held at 45° F or cooler (preferably 40° F) while under refrigeration or if frozen they must be kept at 0°F or less.

To ensure that these special temperature requirements are met, a bayonet-type probe thermometer, accurate within 2° F (plus or minus) and having a temperature range from 0° to 220° F must be used. In order to keep foods from becoming excessively contaminated, they must be dated immediately when they arrive and are placed into storage. Refrigerated, ready-to-eat foods, with the exception of cured meats, aged cheese products and fresh produce, must be discarded after three days of storage. Any cooked food removed from its heat source that is not maintained at temperatures of 135° F or above must be discarded after four hours. Food should never be held between the temperatures of 45°F and 135°F for more than four hours.

When operating disaster-feeding sites, cooking and serving at once is the best preparation method. Food items should not be cooked, cooled, and reheated for later service because of limiting factors, such as refrigeration capabilities and inexperienced food service staff.

Types of Foods

Foods recommended to serve from a disaster-feeding site are:

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| Bottled water | Packaged, dried or dehydrated foods |
| Canned beverages | Prepared and packaged cakes and pies |
| Canned milk and dried milk | Canned or packaged biscuits, breads, crackers, cookies and cake mixes |
| Canned meats, fish and poultry | Fresh vegetables from commercial sources |
| Canned or packaged staples | Canned soups |
| Canned fruit, jellies, jams and vegetables | Instant desserts, puddings, Jell-O |
| Canned juices | Freeze-dried foods |
| Packaged cereal products | |

If refrigeration and freezer space are available, the following foods can be served:

- Frozen, pasteurized liquid eggs
- Luncheon meats and packaged cheeses
- Precooked, USDA-inspected packaged meats
- Portioned USDA-inspected packaged raw meats
- Pasteurized milk
- Frozen fish and fish products from inspected plants
- Precut USDA inspected poultry and poultry products
- Packaged frozen desserts
- Concentrated frozen juices

Foods that should be avoided at disaster feeding sites are:

All home-canned foods

Foods prepared in private homes

Any bulging or badly dented or rusted cans of food

Salads made with meat, fish, eggs, poultry, potatoes, and any sandwiches made with these salads

Meat and poultry dressings and stuffing **

Rare or medium-cooked meats, particularly pork, poultry and ground beef

Cream fillings, cream sauces, creamed meats, custards and gravies**

Unpasteurized milk

**Exceptions are those stuffing and gravy mixes combined with water and cooked on the stovetop and not with the meat.

If you have questions concerning types or groups of foods or need assistance with menus, contact your local health department, or

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