

After the Flood Food Safety Advisory

BURLINGTON – The Vermont Department of Health is advising gardeners to throw away any fruits and vegetables – including root crops – that have been in contact with floodwater. According to the federal Food and Drug Administration, all flood-affected crops – fruits and vegetables, above and below ground – should not be consumed, sold or given away.

Apples, pears or other high-growing fruit that were not touched by floodwater should be washed with a known safe source of water before eating.

“Any fresh produce that has been in contact with floodwaters cannot be considered safe to eat,” said Health Commissioner Harry Chen, MD. “This is a change from our earlier advisory. Because the flooding was so extensive and so forceful, there is potential for contamination that cannot be washed or disinfected away.”

Flood food safety guidance:

- Throw away ANY food that has come into contact with floodwater.
- Throw away any food that is not in a waterproof container if there is any chance that it has come into contact with floodwater. Food containers that are not waterproof include those with screw-caps, snap lids, pull tops and crimped caps. Also discard cardboard juice/milk/baby formula boxes and home canned foods if they have come in contact with floodwater because they cannot be effectively cleaned and sanitized.
- For canned goods that came into contact with floodwater, remove labels, wash thoroughly with soap and hot water. Then place in a weak bleach solution made with 1 tbs. unscented liquid chlorine bleach for every gallon of water from a known safe source and leave for 15 minutes. Re-label with marker.
- If refrigerator and freezer doors are kept closed as much as possible during a power outage, a refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours. A full freezer will keep the temperature for about 48 hours, a half-full freezer will keep the temperature for about 24 hours.
- Do not cook and eat meat, poultry, fish, eggs or other refrigerated foods that have been above 40 degrees F for two hours or more.
- Wash hands thoroughly with clean water and soap before and after handling food items.
- Never taste food to determine if it is safe. Some foods may look and smell fine, but if it has been at room temperature for more than two hours it can make you sick. Bacteria multiply very quickly at room temperature.
- **If you have any doubt about any food item, throw it out.**

For more information about food safety after the flood –

Go to the Health Department’s website at www.healthvermont.gov, call 800-439-8550 (toll-free) or 863-7220 – or dial 2-1-1.

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