

POWER OUTAGES

USE THE FOLLOWING TIPS DURING A POWER OUTAGE TO HELP YOU AND YOUR FAMILY STAY SAFE

Food safety

Power outages can make food unsafe to eat due to lack of refrigeration. The following tips will help reduce food spoilage and prevent a potential food-borne illness during an outage:

Freezer:

- Without electrical power, a full freezer will keep food frozen for approximately two days and a half-full freezer will keep food frozen for one day
- Keep the freezer door closed as much as possible to help frozen food last longer. Ice will also help the food stay frozen
- Food items that still contain ice crystals can be refrozen
- Throw out food items in the freezer that have come into contact with raw meat juices
- Ensure there are accurate thermometers in each freezer. Use a probe thermometer to check internal food temperatures

Refrigerator-freezer combination:

- If the door is kept closed as much as possible, a fridge without electrical power will keep food cool for four to six hours. Ice can also help keep the fridge's contents cool
- Throw out meat, fish, poultry, eggs, and any leftovers that have been out for more than two hours at temperatures above 4°C (40°F)
- Consider using coolers or ice chests with a supply for food storage
- If in doubt, throw it out
- Ensure there are accurate thermometers in each refrigerator. This will help ensure that the refrigerator temperature is 4°C (40°F) or lower. Use a probe thermometer to check internal food temperatures

Safe water

Communal or municipal water:

Your local water utility will issue a Boil Water Advisory (BWA) or Drinking Water Advisory (DWA) if there is a problem with the safety of the water.

Advisories will be communicated by municipal water utility and/or the local Medical Officer of Health through the local media. You can also contact Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653 (TTY 1-866-512-6228) to find out if a BWA or DWA is in effect.

When a Boil Water Advisory has been issued:

Bring the water to a boil for at least one minute (water should be bubbling and rolling). If you must use a gas barbecue to boil water, use it outdoors. Never use gasoline or charcoal burning devices inside your home, basement, garage or near a window during a power outage. Carbon monoxide gas from these appliances can build up in your home and poison the people inside.

If you can't boil your water or are preparing infant formula, use an alternative source of potable water such as commercially bottled water.

Private well water:

- If you use water from your own well, a power outage will normally cause your water pump to stop working. Use an alternate source of safe water, such as commercially bottled water or boil your water for at least one minute (water should be bubbling and rolling)
- If you have a backup power generator, you can continue to use the water normally if the water purification system you are using, such as an ultraviolet light, is also operating
- If you still have water during a power outage (because a generator is powering the water pump) but the water is contaminated by floodwaters, then do not use the water for cooking, drinking or bathing. Instead, use bottled water or water from the municipal water supply

Note: Boiling will not remove chemicals, so water from flooded wells should be tested before being used

Private sewage disposal systems:

If you are on a private sewage disposal system, check to see if it is using an electric pump. If so, limit your water use until power is restored, as a sewage backup may occur if the septic and pump tanks get too full.

If the pump is between your home and the septic tank, you can also collect your wastewater in pails and pour it into the inlet side of your septic tank. For a longer power outage, having your septic tank pumped by a licensed sewage hauler will allow you to store more wastewater until your pump is working again.

Extreme temperatures

Power outages can leave homes and other buildings without heat or air conditioning. This can pose health risks when combined with extreme cold or heat, especially to those who are most vulnerable, such as young children, seniors, and people with pre-existing medical conditions.

Take the following steps to stay safe:

Extreme heat

- Drink plenty of cool water before feeling thirsty
- Close blinds and curtains to reduce the heat coming into your home
- Open windows at night if the outdoor air is cooler
- Check on family, friends or neighbours and use [this tool to help you](#) assess how your loved ones are faring in the heat

Extreme cold

- Make sure your head, face, ears, neck, hands, and feet are well protected
- Drink warm fluids

- Do not ignore shivering, it is a sign the body is losing heat

Prevent carbon monoxide poisoning

Carbon monoxide (CO) is an invisible, odourless and tasteless gas produced by fuel-burning appliances and equipment. CO can build up in an enclosed space and cause sudden illness and death if inhaled. During a power outage, ventilation systems will not work, and this can result in CO gas building up in a home or garage.

Tips to avoid CO poisoning:

- Never use any gasoline, natural gas or propane equipment intended for outdoor use in homes, garages, basements, crawl spaces and other enclosed areas, even with ventilation. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for use
- Use outdoor gas-powered equipment away from doors, windows, vents, and air conditioning units
- Check with your gas fireplace manufacturer or technician to see if you can safely operate your gas fireplace without electricity
- If you start to feel sick, dizzy, or weak while using gas powered equipment, turn off the item immediately, get to fresh air right away and seek medical attention
- If you smell unusual odours such as gasoline, natural gas, or propane, immediately leave the property and call your local gas company and fire department

Prevent electrical hazards

Power outages caused by flooding can lead to electrical shocks or electrocution. Stay safe by:

- Staying out of floodwaters as much as possible, especially near electrical lines or outlets
- Wearing rubber boots to avoid electrical shocks
- Shutting off power in flooded areas at the breaker box and notifying your power company
- Turning off all tools, appliances, and electronic equipment, and not using electrical devices while standing in or near water
- Turning the thermostat(s) for the home heating system down to minimum
- Returning home after a flood only after local authorities have told you it is safe to do so
- Calling 911 if someone has been electrocuted and ensuring they are no longer in contact with the electrical source before you touch them

For more information on how to stay safe during a power outage, contact Health Connection at 1-800-361-5653.

Resources:

- Government of Canada - [Power Outage factsheets](#)
- [Guidance for Issuing and Rescinding Boil Water Advisories in Canadian Drinking Water Supplies](#)
- [Technical Standards and Safety Authority Carbon Monoxide Safety](#)
- York Region Emergency Management - [York Region's Emergency Preparedness Guide](#)
- York Region Public Health - [Extreme Heat](#) and [Extreme Cold](#)
- York Region Public Health - [Food Safety for Operators during a Power Outage](#)