

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH ISSUES PRECAUTIONS FOR FOOD SAFETY DURING ELECTRICAL OUTAGES**

(Eastern, Va.)—In the case of an electrical outage, it is important to take careful precautions to ensure food safety. The risk of food poisoning is heightened when refrigerators and ovens are inoperable. Discard any food that has been at room temperature for two hours or more, and any food that has an unusual odor, color or texture. Just remember, “*When in doubt, throw it out!*”

People can practice safe food handling and prevent food-borne illness by following simple steps:

- Always keep a thermometer in your refrigerator. The temperature should read 41 F or below.
- A full cooler or freezer will maintain its cold temperatures longer than one that is partially filled, so it is important to pack plenty of extra ice or freezer packs to insure a constant cold temperature. If available, 25 pounds of dry ice will keep a 10-cubic-foot freezer below freezing for three to four days. Use care when handling dry ice and wear dry, heavy gloves to avoid injury.
- Thawed food can usually be eaten if it is still “refrigerator cold.”
- Eggs and other foods need to be stored in 41 F or slightly below. Do not eat foods that may have spoiled.
- **Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled and cooled or disinfected. Wash your hands:**
  - After using the bathroom or changing a diaper
  - After handling handle uncooked food
  - After playing with a pet
  - After handling garbage
  - After tending to someone who is sick or injured
  - After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
  - After participating in flood cleanup activities
  - After handling articles contaminated with flood water or sewage
  - Before preparing or eating food
  - Before treating a cut or wound
  - Before inserting or removing contact lenses
- Fight cross-contamination, which is the transfer of harmful bacteria to food from other foods, cutting boards or utensils. Never place any type of food on a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry or seafood.

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- Use a meat thermometer to ensure that food reaches a safe internal temperature.
- Hamburgers and ground meat should be cooked to 160 F.
- Poultry should be cooked to 170 F.
- Roasts, steaks and other large cuts of beef should be cooked to 145 F (rare) and 160 F (medium).
- Fish should be cooked until the meat is opaque and flakes easily.
- Use sanitized food and water bowls for your pets and be sure that they do not drink from flood-contaminated surfaces.

For additional food safety information, call the toll-free USDA/FSIS Meat and Poultry Hotline at (888) 674-6854. Food safety specialists (both English and Spanish speaking) are available from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. EDT on weekdays year-round.

For more information about how to protect yourself and your family before, during and after natural disasters, visit [www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov) or the Virginia Department of Emergency Management's Web site at [www.vaemergency.com](http://www.vaemergency.com).

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