



## Power Outages

### What to Do When the Lights Go Out

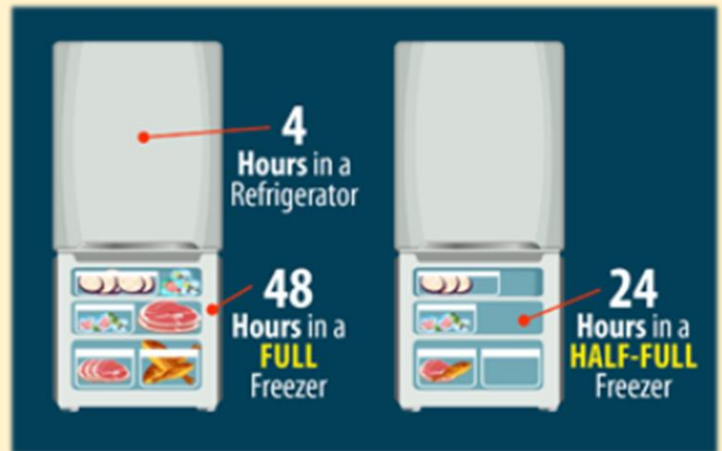


Last month, we discussed some of the dangers of cold weather, including tips on weathering winter storms. In that article, we mentioned that winter storms can damage power lines, and cause power outages in local areas. But power outages are a danger during all parts of the year, when weather (both hot and cold) could affect the power grid. This article is meant to talk about what steps you can take to prepare for a power outage, and what to do when an outage continues for a long period of time.

## Food and Medicine

One of the most important factors to consider about a power outage is many foods and medications (especially liquid medications) must be refrigerated in order to remain safe to consume. If a power outage lasts longer than a few hours, some food might go bad, and medication might become ineffective. Follow these tips to keep track of and help protect your temperature-sensitive food and medicines:

- Refrigerators can keep food cold for four (4) hours
- A full freezer can keep food cold for up to 48 hours, while a half-full freezer can keep food cold for up to 24 hours
- Keep the refrigerator doors closed as often as possible to help keep food cold
- If you have access to a cooler and ice packs, you can store perishable food in those so long as you can maintain the temperature at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below. Replace ice and ice packs as time passes to maintain temperature
- Have a thermometer (such as a probe thermometer for food) to test your food temperatures. If you use ice packs to keep food cold, make sure they remain below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Discard it if it becomes warmer than this
- If you have an appliance thermometer in your freezer, check it and make sure it is 40 degrees or below. These food items can be refrozen or cooked so long as it was below 40 degrees
- BEFORE a power outage occurs, you can help keep your important food cold by freezing ice packs or gel packs, and then using them in coolers



- If the power outage lasts a long time, you can use dry ice or block ice to keep your fridge cold longer
- Do not taste any food to see if it's still safe to eat. If the food has an unusual odor, color, or texture, throw it out
- Better safe than sorry: if in doubt, throw the food out if it's been in the fridge without power for 4 hours or longer
- Talk to your provider about any medication that needs refrigeration. Find out how long it can be stored at higher temperatures, and work with your provider to ensure you have an alternative means of keeping the medication cold, if necessary

- If the power has been out for longer than one (1) day, and you have medication that you could not keep cold but that requires refrigeration, throw it out unless the label (or your provider) says otherwise
- If your life depends on a refrigerated drug, store at room temperature and continue using **only** until you can obtain a new supply

## Be Prepared!

What's the safest way to make sure you can get through a power outage? In the modern world, we rely a lot on electricity for light to get around, for cooking, and to regulate the temperature in our homes. Here's a list of Do's and Don'ts for power outages:

- Have flashlights and batteries on hand and ready
- Have access to a battery-powered or hand-crank radio for weather updates
- If you have medical equipment that needs electricity, plan for an alternate means of maintaining power (speak with your provider about options)
- Keep the gas tank in your car at least half full
- Have a phone available that doesn't require the house's electricity to function (e.g. a cell phone)
- Turn off any electrical equipment you were using before the outage, to avoid the risk of damage when the power comes back on
- Keep a battery-operated carbon monoxide detector on every level of your home and outside every sleeping area, and make sure there are fully operable and the batteries are properly replaced
- Space permitting, keep plastic containers filled with water (with an inch or so of available space) to help keep the fridge/freezer cool during an outage
- **Do not** use flame candles for light
- **Do not** use a generator inside the home or garage
- If using a generator, keep it further than 20 feet away from your home and windows
- Keep food supplies that don't require refrigeration and bottled water
- Maintain an emergency kit (see September 2022 issue and the reference section below for details)
- **Do not** use a gas stove for heat



## Stay Safe

Power outages can mean downed power lines and the loss of protection from severe heat and cold. Below are some tips more geared towards staying safe until power can be restored/repaired:

- Power outages can occur during cases of severe weather. During hot weather, find ways to stay cool (see August 2022 Health Tips). During cold weather, find ways to stay warm (see January 2023 Health Tips)
- Check in on neighbors, especially elderly neighbors or neighbors with young children

- Sign up for local alerts and weather updates
- Be careful of downed power lines; avoid contact
- If a power line falls on your car, **DO NOT** leave the vehicle. Use your phone or horn to contact for help, and tell people not to touch the car until emergency services arrive
  - If the car catches fire, open the door. **Do not** step out of the car. Jump free of the car so that your body clears the vehicle before touching the ground. Once clear of the car, shuffle at least 50 feet away with both feet on the ground
- If you use a portable generator, it is recommended you have a qualified electrician install it to avoid possible backfeed injuring electrical repair workers fixing the power grid
- Make sure your main breaker is off and locked out prior to starting your portable generator
- In the event of extreme temperatures (hot or cold), consider going to community locations with power if you cannot maintain safe temperatures in your home



### References

**Food Safety Info Page** - <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/food-safety-during-a-power-outage.html>

**CDC Severe Weather Info Page** - <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/poweroutage/needtoknow.html>

**NFPA Blackout Fact Sheet** - <https://www.nfpa.org/-/media/Files/Public-Education/Resources/Community-tool-kits/Get-Ready/fact/e/blackouts.ashx>

**FEMA Power Outage Webpage** - <https://www.fema.gov/blog/prepare-yourself-power-outage>

**Ready.gov Fact Sheet** - [https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/power-outage\\_information-sheet.pdf](https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/power-outage_information-sheet.pdf)

**Mass.gov Power Outage Info Page** - <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/power-outages>

**CDC Water Safety During Emergencies** - <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/foodwater/safe-water.html>

**CDC Disaster Advice for Those with Chronic Illness/Disabilities** - <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/chronic.html>

**CDC Worker Safety During Power Outage** - <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/poweroutage/workersafety.html>

**CDC Generator Fact Sheet** - <https://www.cdc.gov/co/generatorsafetyfactsheet.html>

**CDC Emergency Kit Infographic** - [https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/00\\_docs/Emergency-kit-infographic\\_508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/infographics/00_docs/Emergency-kit-infographic_508.pdf)