

# Kent County Health Department Power Outage Fact Sheet



If the power goes out, most homes would be without refrigeration. Some homes would even be without running water and sanitary services. Depending on the season, many homes would not have heat.

If properly prepared, most families could deal with the inconvenience for a few hours or even a couple of days. This means having a fully stocked disaster supply kit in the house. The Health Department has fact sheets available to help you prepare a disaster supply kit with food and other general supplies that could make life a little easier during a power outage. For copies of these fact sheets, check out [www.accesskent.com/Health/HealthDepartment/EmergencyPrep/Fact\\_Sheets.htm](http://www.accesskent.com/Health/HealthDepartment/EmergencyPrep/Fact_Sheets.htm).

## Other Pre-Emergency Preparations

In addition to your disaster supply kit, some things you can do before an emergency strikes include:

- Having at least one telephone in your home that doesn't need electricity (wall plug style or cellular). Cordless phones don't work when there is a power outage.
- Filling your car's gas tank if a heavy storm is predicted.
- Checking to be sure you have an adequate supply of your family's prescription medications on hand.
- Filling your bathtub with water if you are on a well and a heavy storm is predicted. The water can be used for drinking, washing or flushing toilets.

## Food Safety

If the power is out for less than two hours, the food in your refrigerator and freezer will be safe to eat. While the power is out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to keep food cold longer.

If the power is out longer than two hours:

- A freezer that is half full will hold food safely for up to 24 hours. A full freezer will hold food safely for 48 hours.
- Pack milk, other dairy products, meat, fish, eggs, gravy, and perishable leftovers into a cooler surrounded by ice. Inexpensive Styrofoam coolers are fine for this purpose.

Don't put your food outside to keep it cold in the winter. The temperature that's cold enough for refrigerated food (40° or less) is too warm for frozen food which should be between 0° and -10°. The sun could warm the food to a temperature which would allow bacteria to grow. In addition, animals could get into your food and contaminate it.

Keep a thermometer in your refrigerator and freezer at all times. This will eliminate the guesswork of just how cold the unit is. The key to determining the safety of foods is knowing how cold they are. The refrigerator should be set at 40° or less and the freezer should be set between 0° and -10°.

**Generally, food in the refrigerator will remain cold for four to six hours if the door isn't opened. Remember the general rule: When in doubt, throw it out!**

## Water Safety

There are two general methods by which small amounts of water can be effectively disinfected. One method is boiling. It is the best way to make the water safe to drink. Another method is chemical treatment. If used with care, certain chemicals will make most water free from harmful organisms.

## Methods of Emergency Disinfection

**Boiling:** Vigorous boiling for one minute will kill any disease-causing organisms found in water. The flat taste of boiled water can be improved by:

- Pouring it back and forth from one container to another
- Allowing it to stand for a few hours
- Adding a small pinch of salt for each quart of water boiled

**Chemical:** When boiling is not practical, chemical disinfection should be used. The two chemicals commonly used are chlorine and iodine.

## Chlorine Methods

**Chlorine Bleach:** Common household bleach (7-10% available chlorine) contains a chlorine compound that will disinfect water. Follow the instructions written on the label.

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If the water is clear, add 1/8 teaspoon per gallon of water. Double the amount of chlorine for cloudy or colored water or water that is very cold. Never mix bleach with ammonia or other cleaners.

Treated water should be mixed thoroughly. It should be allowed to stand for 30 minutes, covered if possible. The water should have a slight chlorine smell; if not, repeat the dosage and allow the water to stand an extra 15 minutes. If the treated water has too strong a chlorine taste, it can be made more pleasing by:

- Allowing the water to stand exposed to the air for a few hours
- Pouring it from one clean container to another several times

**Chlorine Tablets:** Chlorine tablets with the proper dosage for drinking water disinfection can be bought in a commercially prepared form. These tablets are available from drug and sporting goods stores. They should be used as directed. If instructions aren't available, use one tablet for each quart of water to be purified.

### Iodine Methods

**Tincture of Iodine:** Common household iodine from the medicine cabinet or first aid kit may be used to disinfect water. Add five drops of 2% United States Pharmacopeia (U.S.P) tincture of iodine to each quart of clear water. For cloudy water add ten drops and let the solution stand for at least 30 minutes.

**Iodine tablets:** Commercially prepared iodine tablets containing the necessary dosage for drinking water disinfection can be purchased at drug and sporting goods stores. They should be used as directed. If instructions aren't available, use one tablet for each quart of water to be purified.

### Keeping Warm if the Power Goes Out

- If the heat goes out during a winter storm, you can keep warm by closing off rooms you don't need. Dress in layers of lightweight clothing and wear a hat.

- If you need to use an alternate heating source such as a fireplace, wood stove, or portable kerosene heater, be sure to have adequate ventilation to the outside. Without enough fresh air, carbon monoxide can build up in your home.
- Keep children away from all heaters to avoid accidental burns.
- Never use a natural gas or propane stove/oven to heat your home.

### Generators

Some people have generators that can provide enough power to run a furnace and, if necessary, a well pump during an extended power outage. Another reason to consider a generator is for back-up power to run your refrigerator and freezer. Whatever the situation, it's important to size the unit correctly and follow the manufacturer's recommendations for its safe operations. As a portable unit, the generator can power electrical equipment and household appliances using heavy-duty, outdoor extension cords plugged directly into the generator. Check the extension cords frequently to make sure they haven't become hot during use.

### Other Generator Tips

- Never run a generator inside your home, basement or attached garage. Generators should only be run outside away from open windows. Carbon monoxide in the generator's fumes can build up and cause carbon monoxide poisoning which can lead to death.
- Keep children away from generators at all times.
- Keep gasoline in proper storage containers and away from generators. Improper storage can cause explosions and/or fires.
- Do not exceed the rated capacity of your generator. Overloading your generator can damage it and your appliances connected to it. Follow the manufacturer's instructions.