

## Food Safety for Relief Volunteers

Food Safety is an issue everyday. People die from eating food that has been handled improperly. While it is hard during trying times and natural disasters to handle food, we still need to exercise caution to make sure people we are trying to help don't get sick.

Food borne illness has symptoms that range from stomach upset to respiratory failure. The symptoms can appear as soon as 20 minutes from the time you eat the food to 2 weeks later. The goal of emergency feeding programs is to provide safe food for those in crisis. Here are a few precautions:

- 1) Clean Hands – Wash your hands in hot, running, potable water for 20 seconds before you handle food or enter a food preparation area. Dry with a paper towel. Wash your hands again every time you change tasks, touch your clothes or body, drink, or smoke. Be sure to wash your hands before serving food, too.

When potable water is not available, use hand sanitizer or antibacterial wipes with an alcohol base.

- 2) Keep hot foods hot. Cooked foods should be cooked to the temperatures indicated by the local health district or United States Department of Agriculture. Once food has been cooked to the right temperature, it needs to be held at 140 degrees. Once it has fallen below 140 degrees for more than 4 hours it must be discarded.
- 3) Keep food cold. Cold food including meat and cheese sandwiches need to be held at 40 degrees. Once the temperature has risen above 40 degrees it should be discarded in 4 hours. Plan schedules to allow no more sandwiches or cold items than can be used in 4 hours to remain at room temperature.
- 4) Avoid cross contamination. When preparing or serving food, do not handle or mix raw with prepared food. Keep meat and produce separate.

In emergency situations, be sure not to spread germs from one source to another. If you come into contact with contaminated substances, wash your hands before handling the food. If food comes in contact with potential contamination, throw it away.

***Information given above refers to food cooked in a commercial kitchen following times and temperatures indicated in the FDA model food code. Food prepared and handled in consumer homes follow different time guidelines.***

For more information refer to [www.Foodsafety.gov](http://www.Foodsafety.gov)  
Call the USDA meat and poultry hotline at 1-888-674-6854  
Call the FDA at 1-888-723-3366

Reference: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/hurricanes/pdf/handwashing.pdf>

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