

Keeping well during storm recovery

October 2025

Protecting your health during an emergency

- Emergencies can be stressful. If you're having a tough time, free counselling is available by calling or texting 1737 at any time of the day or night.
- Food and water are easily contaminated during emergencies, so take extra care to avoid getting sick.
- Washing your hands is one of the best ways you can protect you and your family from getting sick. Clean, warm soapy water should always be your first choice. If safe water is not available, you can use alcohol-based products to disinfect your hands.
- Always wash your hands with soap and safe water (that has been boiled or disinfected):
 - Before preparing or eating food
 - After using the toilet
- Use safe/clean water to drink brush your teeth, wash your hands, wash and prepare food, baby formula and ice and wash dishes.

For more information, visit:

1. <https://info.health.nz/keeping-healthy/protecting-health-natural-disaster/during-an-emergency#use-water-safely-during-an-emergency-4934>
2. <https://www.taumataarowai.govt.nz/for-communities/emergencies/treating-water/>

Food and medication safety in an emergency

- If you have no power for your fridge – eat foods that expire first like bread and meat.
- Open the fridge and freezer as little as possible to keep it cool for longer
- Put any medication that requires refrigeration in a chiller bin or bag with ice packs. If the power outage is for a prolonged period, contact a local pharmacy or your family doctor who may be able to provide advice about whether your medicines are safe to use and/or provide emergency supplies. Visit: <https://www.healthpoint.co.nz> for pharmacies and doctors opening hours in your area.
- Throw out rotting food before it spoils other food
- Eat canned food last.

For more information, visit:

1. <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/food-business/food-safety-in-natural-disasters-and-emergencies-2/>
2. <https://info.health.nz/keeping-healthy/protecting-health-natural-disaster/during-an-emergency>

Feeding your baby safely during an emergency

- Breastfeeding is the safest way to feed babies, particularly in an emergency. If this is not an option, take extra care when preparing infant formula. You will need safe, clean water and a way to sterilise equipment like bottles and teats.
- If you do not have safe water or electricity, take extra care preparing feeds.
- Surfaces and utensils must be as clean as possible. If you cannot clean a surface, cover it with a clean paper towel.
- Wash your hands for 20 seconds. If you do not have warm, soapy water use a baby wipe for any visible dirt and then use an alcohol-based sanitiser.

Sterilise in hot water

- Boil equipment at a rolling boil for 1 minute. Keep the pot covered until you need the items and use tongs to remove items. You can re-boil the water and use again.

Sterilise in cold water

- Use sterilising tablets and soak for at least 15 minutes, making sure there are no air bubbles. You can keep the equipment in the solution with a lid on it.
- Make a new sterilising solution every 24 hours. Use the old solution for washing hands or dishes.
- If you do not have a bottle, use a sterilised cup or spoon. Let the baby sip, don't pour formula down the baby's throat. They will need practice.

Make water safe for preparing formula

- If your usual drinking water supply is not available, make sure your replacement water is safe.
- The safest water option to use in an emergency is commercial bottled water that is sealed.
- Boil water (including commercially bottled water) for 1 minute for babies of all ages, this is especially important for babies less than 3 months of age. Remember to cool to room temperature before use.
- You can use an electric jug or a stove kettle until it switches or whistles.

For more information, visit:

1. <https://info.health.nz/keeping-healthy/protecting-health-natural-disaster/during-an-emergency#feeding-your-baby-safely-during-an-emergency-6838>
2. [How to make water safe to drink under a boil water notice — Taumata Arowai](#)

3. <https://info.health.nz/keeping-healthy/protecting-health-natural-disaster/during-an-emergency>

Animal welfare

If you have questions or concerns about animal welfare emergency management phone MPI on 0800 00 83 33.

Food safety advice

- If you have no power, avoid getting sick from unsafe food
- Eat foods that will expire soon first – such as bread, meat, salads, and dairy products – because they spoil more quickly than non-perishable food.
- During the power failure, open your fridge or freezer as little as possible to help keep it cooler for longer. Unopened fridges should hold refrigeration temperature for 4 hours.
- Freezers will remain colder for longer if they are full (2–4 days) compared to if they are half full (1–2 days). So, leave already frozen food in the freezer if possible.
- Eat your canned and non-perishable pantry foods last.
- If in doubt, throw it out. All perishable food can become unsafe to eat if it reaches temperatures where harmful bacteria can grow and cause food poisoning.
- See our factsheet for more information: https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/55615-Food-safety-in-the-home-after-flooding_