Power outages from recent storms may cause foods to become spoiled and cause illness if eaten, according to officials from the Minnesota Department of Health. To prevent illness, officials encourage Minnesotans without power to follow basic food safety advice.

"Do not trust your eyes or sense of smell to determine if food has gone bad," said Assistant Commissioner of Health Aggie Leitheiser. "Food may be unsafe to eat, even if it doesn't look or smell bad. The old adage applies: when in doubt, throw it out." The department provides the following food safety information and advice to people without power:

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperature.

- Refrigerators will keep food cold for about four hours when left unopened.

- A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if the door remains closed.

- If the food stored in the refrigerator has been held above 41 degrees F for more than four hours, throw it away.

- If food stored in the freezer has thawed but is still below 41 F, it can be refrozen. Although the quality of the food may be compromised, it should remain safe to eat.

Health officials offered additional advice relating to hot and stormy weather:

- Stay cool and drink plenty of fluids to prevent heat-related illness.

- Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.

- Avoid power lines and use electric tools and appliances safely to prevent electrical shock.

- Never use generators, grills, or other gasoline-, propane-, or charcoal-burning devices inside your home, garage, or carport or near doors, windows, or vents. They produce carbon monoxide, an odorless, colorless gas that kills more than 500 Americans each year. If your home is damaged, stay with friends or family or in a shelter.

Restaurants and other food businesses can call MDH at 651-201-4500 or their local health department for more information about food safety during power outages.

More information is available at http://www.health.state.mn.us/foodsafety/emergency/index.html.
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