

Guidelines for Child Care Centres During a Power Outage

This fact sheet is a guideline only. It is important to listen for media reports and watch for notifications from the health unit with specific information regarding the power outage.

Where do I start?

Identify a “Person-in-Charge” who will be responsible for ongoing management of the emergency situation and ensure ongoing compliance with safety requirements for your child care centre.

Cold Holding - Refrigeration

A refrigerator without power will keep food cold for 4-6 hours as long as the door is kept closed. The length of time is dependent on the temperature of the room and the temperature of the fridge before the power outage.

Immediately:

- **Record** the time the power outage began.
- **Monitor** and record food temperatures every 2 hours with a probe thermometer.
- **Add ice to the refrigerators** to maximize the time the food stays cold.
- **Minimize** refrigerator opening.

Start planning for:

- **Relocation** of food to a refrigerated truck, an alternate location unaffected by the power outage, or to portable coolers.
- **Immediate Use** of Potentially Hazardous Foods that have risen into the Danger Zone (above 4°C/40°F) but have been there for less than 2 hours.
- **Discarding food.** Potentially Hazardous Foods that have been stored above 4°C/40°F) for more than 2 hours need to be discarded.

Cold Holding – Frozen

A full freezer will keep food frozen about 2 days if the freezer is kept closed. A half-loaded freezer will keep food frozen about half a day if the freezer is left closed.

Immediately:

- **Keep freezers closed.**
- **Add ice to the freezer** and add additional insulation, covering the freezer with blankets, to assist in keeping the food frozen longer.

Start planning for:

- **Relocation of frozen food** to a freezer truck, or an alternate location unaffected by the power outage.
- **Thawing of food.** Potentially hazardous foods that have thawed but the temperature has not increased to above 4°C/40°F can be safely cooked and eaten or cooked and refrozen.
- **Refreezing of partially thawed foods.** As a general rule, if there are ice crystals in the food, and there are no obvious signs of spoilage, then it's safe to quickly refreeze. Do not refreeze thawed ready-to-eat foods.
- **Discarding food.** Any food that has completely thawed and has been sitting at room temperature for more than 2 hours or an unknown period of time needs to be discarded.

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Mechanical Ventilation

Immediately:

Discontinue interior cooking that produces steam, smoke and grease laden vapours.

Cooking

Immediately:

- **Discard** potentially hazardous foods that were in the cooking process but did not reach a safe final cooking temperature unless cooking can be completed immediately by an alternate method.

Start planning for:

- **Obtaining an alternate heat source** for cooking.
- **Never** use charcoal or gas barbecues or propane fueled appliances indoors.

Hot Holding

Immediately:

- **Record** the time the power went out.
- **Monitor** hot holding temperatures hourly.

Start planning for:

- **Obtaining an alternate heat source** for hot holding.
- **Discarding food.** All potentially hazardous foods that have been held in the Danger Zone (below 60°C/140°F) for more than 2 hours must be discarded.

Utensil Washing

Immediately:

- **Use single service tableware** if utensils cannot be adequately washed and sanitized.
- **Use the 3-compartment sink method** for manual dishwashing. Refer to the “Dishwashing – 3 Sink Method” poster for guidance.

Lighting

Immediately:

- **Restrict activities** to those that can be safely conducted in natural light whenever possible.

Start planning for:

- Providing an alternate source of lighting. Candles can pose a fire hazard therefore are not recommended; use flashlights instead.

Hot Water

Immediately:

- Heat small amounts of water on a natural gas or propane appliance.
- **Never** use charcoal or gas barbecues or propane fueled appliances indoors.

Safety Notes: Exercise caution when boiling water around young children.

- Wait for boiled water to cool to at least 49°C/120°F before allowing it to touch a child’s skin.
- Boil water on the back burners of your stove to keep it farther from children’s reach.

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Air Conditioning

Heat related illnesses can develop within a short period of time when exposed to extreme heat.

Immediately:

- Have drinking water available for all children
- Keep shades drawn and blinds closed on the sunny side of your facility.

Start planning for:

- **Monitoring of children** for signs and symptoms of heat-related illness.
- **Cooling** with a cool bath, shower or cool down with cool, wet towels.
- Refer to the factsheet “**Heat Alert Guidelines for Child Care Centres**”.

Loss of Heat

Immediately:

- **Conserve body heat** by dressing warmly in layers and using blankets.

Start planning for:

- **Locating an alternate heat source.**

Reference: Adapted with permission from the Middlesex London Health Unit

Well Pump (if applicable)

Immediately:

- Obtain a supply of potable water. Refer to the Fact Sheet “**Guidelines for Childcare Centres during a Water Interruption.**”

Sewage Pump (if applicable)

Immediately:

- **Discontinue all operations.** If the sewage pump is not functional, continuing to use water in the facility will result in sewage backing-up into the lowest fixtures. Contact a public health inspector for advice.