

Community information – Storms

Information for communities impacted by storms – February 2024

OFFICIAL

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Factsheet title	English	Translated resource
Power outages: using alternative fuel and elec. generation safely	Power outages: using alternative fuel and elec. generation safely	Power outages: using alternative fuel and elec. generation safely
Power outages: food safety after a power failure	Power outages: food safety after a power failure	Power outages: food safety after a power failure
Private water sources in bushfire-affected areas	Private water sources in bushfire-affected areas	n/a

Power outages and food safety

The most important thing is to try to keep cold and frozen food cold. If food is still cold to touch (less than 5 °C), it is safe to use.

Before and after a power failure:

- Once cold or frozen food is no longer cold to touch, it can be kept and eaten for up to 4 hours and then it must be thrown away.
- If it is raw meat, it should be cooked and eaten.
- Eat hot food within 4 hours of it being heated or throw it away.
- If power is restored when frozen food is still frozen solid the food is safe.

During a power failure, the following actions will keep frozen and cold food frozen or chilled for longer:

- Move food from the fridge to the freezer.
- If available, put bagged ice under food packages and trays stored in freezers and fridges if power failure lasts more than 1 hour.
- Place an insulating blanket over cold or frozen food, where possible.
- Only open fridge and freezer doors when absolutely necessary, this will keep the food and air temperature colder for longer.

Medications:

- Some medicines need to be refrigerated - if you leave them out of the fridge by accident or they freeze, check with your pharmacist whether they should be thrown out or used within a certain time.

More information: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/food-safety/food-safety-during-power-outages#emergency-power-failures> and <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/emergencies-coping-without-gas-or-electricity>

Ladder safety tips

Falling from ladders can cause serious injuries requiring visits to the emergency department and hospital stays. Falls from ladders can cause injuries that can have long-term consequences and some people won't ever get back to normal.

How you can stay safe using a ladder

- Make sure your ladder is the right height for the jobs you are likely to use it for and is in good working order that is a standards-approved ladder (Australian Standard AS/NZS 1892).
- Don't work in wet, windy or hot conditions. A very hot day can cause people to feel dizzy or faint and lose their balance on a ladder. A wet or windy day may cause you or the ladder to slip or fall.
- Check that your ladder is on even ground, as surfaces that are uneven or sloped will increase your risk of falling from the ladder.
- Having another person with you to hold and support the ladder can help prevent the ladder from slipping.
- Be careful when pulling items from shelves, gutters and roofs as this may cause you to lose your balance.
- Maintain 3 points of contact at all times while on the ladder. Use 2 hands when climbing. When using a tool, make sure both feet and your other hand are secure on the ladder.
- Only climb as far as the second step from the top of a step ladder or the third step or rung from the top of an extension ladder.

More information: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/ladder-safety>

Gardening equipment safety

Make sure your gardening equipment is safe.

- Wear safety goggles when you use line trimmers (such as whipper snippers) – they are a common cause of gardening-related eye injuries.
- Be aware of electrical leads (and make sure you don't cut through them) when you use tools such as hedge trimmers, line trimmers and electric mowers.
- Don't stand on the highest rungs of a ladder. There is a high risk of tipping. Falling from a ladder can cause serious injury, fractures, dislocations and soft tissue injuries.

- Wear earmuffs or earplugs when using noisy equipment such as lawnmowers, line trimmers and chainsaws.
- Use the right tool for the task and make sure it is the right sized tool for you.
- If a hot day, rest frequently and relax in the shade with a drink of water.
- Bend at the knees and don't strain when lifting heavy objects. If the object is too heavy for you, seek help.

More information: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/gardening-safety>

Mould removal at home

After a storm, there may be damage to your home that lets water in. The best way to control mould growth is to control moisture, so it is important to identify the sources of moisture and remove or control them.

- Dispose of any mouldy items that are unable to be cleaned including cardboard boxes and mattresses which should be disposed of.
- In many cases, household detergent or white vinegar will be sufficient. Use a microfibre cloth and rinse the dirty cloth regularly in a separate container of clean water to prevent spreading the mould.
- To reduce the chance of mould regrowth, it is important to dry the area where the mould grew. The simplest way to dry a room is to open doors and windows to thoroughly air the house.

More information: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/mould-removal-at-home>

Preventing illness from contaminated water

Water used for drinking needs to be safe to prevent disease and ill health.

- Local water authorities will tell you if tap water is safe or unsafe to drink, use for cooking, cleaning or bathing.
- If the water is not safe, use bottled, boiled or disinfected water.
- An above ground rainwater tank that has not been inundated with floodwaters or damaged should be safe for continued use.

More information: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/emergencies-floods#preventing-illness-from-contaminated-water>

Mental health – Trauma – reaction and recovery

It is normal to have strong emotional or physical reactions following a distressing event. On most occasions though, these reactions subside as a part of the body's natural healing and recovery process.

People can experience a range of physical, mental, emotional and behavioural reactions. For example,

- **Mental reactions** to trauma include: reduced concentration and memory, intrusive thoughts about the event, repeatedly playing parts of the event over in the mind, confusion or disorientation.
- **Emotional reactions** to trauma can include: fear, anxiety and **panic**, shock – difficulty believing in what has happened, feeling detached and confused, feeling numb and detached, not wanting to connect with others or becoming withdrawn from those around you.
- **Behavioural reactions** to trauma can include: avoiding reminders of the event, inability to stop focusing on what occurred, getting immersed in recovery-related tasks, losing touch with normal daily routines, changed appetite, such as eating a lot more or a lot less, turning to substances such as alcohol, cigarettes and coffee, sleeping problems.
- Seek professional help if you don't begin to return to normal after three or four weeks.

More information: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/trauma-reaction-and-recovery> and <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/talking-to-children-about-bushfires>

Mental health – services and support

Sometimes it can be hard to know who to talk to if you are experiencing a mental health crisis. If you do not have family and friends living nearby or a strong local support network, it can be hard to get through difficult times on your own. Whether you are in a crisis or you just feel down and need to talk to someone, it is important to know that help is available at all hours of the day and night.

There are many free mental health hotlines and mental health online support services across Victoria, which provide crisis support, information, resources, counselling and therapy to people of all ages.

More information: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/counselling-online-and-phone-support-for-mental-illness>