

News Release

For Immediate Release

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Emergency Preparedness and Food Preservation

For September's National Preparedness Month, Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) encourages residents to learn about safe food preservation to increase their emergency food supply.

“Food preservation has become popular in the past two years during the pandemic; more families are learning to grow and harvest their own gardens,” states Kay Schmidt, Emergency Response Coordinator for SWNPHD. “Food preservation will extend the shelf life of meats and produce to add to your emergency food supply. It is also a great way to enjoy fruits and vegetables all year long from your garden.”

Some of the different methods of food preservation are canning, drying, curing, smoking, freezing, pickling, and fermenting. One of the most popular methods is canning, either by water bath or pressure canning. These methods can provide safe and fulfilling stocks in your food supply when combined with proper techniques.

Canning Safely

The canning method will destroy enzymes and remove oxygen within the food to prevent any growth of bacteria, molds, or yeast, if done correctly. When canning is done incorrectly it creates the perfect environment for bacteria to grow, including potentially deadly bacteria that cause botulism. According to the CDC, botulism is a rare but serious illness caused by a toxin that attacks the body's nerves and causes muscle weakness and difficulty breathing.

The most common source of botulism is associated with low-acid foods such as vegetables, milk, meats, fish, and seafood. Pressure canning is the recommended method for these foods. Beginning canners should start with high-acid foods and the water bath method until they are more experienced with food preservation. Some high-acid foods are pickles, salsa, fruits, jams and jellies, and tomatoes.

Food Storage

Once your food has been properly preserved there are a few storage tips to keep in mind.

- Always label and date your jars.
- Keep jars with other emergency food in a clean, cool, dark, dry place.
- Store canned food between 50° and 70° Fahrenheit.

- If you store jars at temperatures outside this range, the food inside can spoil.
- If you store jars where they might freeze (below 32°F), wrap them in newspapers and blankets.
- Stack jars no more than two high so the seals are not damaged.
- Remove, throw away, or use up any canned food before it expires.
 - Home-canned food usually needs to be thrown out after one year.
- Remember that once a can is opened, the contents cannot be saved until later without being refrigerated.
- When storing water, it is best to use food-grade storage containers.
 - Clean and sanitize the container before using it.
 - Replace stored water every six months.

For more information on how to do home food preservation safely, visit the National Center for Home Food Preservation website at nchfp.uga.edu. It includes the USDA Complete Guide to Home Canning along with other resources.

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. The website swhealth.ne.gov contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram. For questions, call 308-345-4223, one number three locations (McCook, Imperial & Ogallala), Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department.

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