



South Dakota  
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# Extension Extra

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## Pandemic Flu Preparation:

# If we don't have utilities, how do we cook, keep things clean?

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"Pandemics are global in nature, but their impact is local. When the next pandemic strikes, as it surely will, it is likely to touch the lives of every individual, family, and community. Our task is to make sure that when this happens, we will be a Nation prepared."

Michael O. Leavitt, Secretary

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Yes, we can expect our lives to be "touched" by an avian influenza pandemic. Our diets and daily routines will be altered, and the concern of all of us will be to protect ourselves and our families. Since we don't know how serious the pandemic may be in our communities, it only pays to prepare. Advance planning can make our homes safe and comfortable. It's not an overwhelming task, and there are many guidelines to help. Look at it this way: The better we are prepared, the better we will respond and rebound, and when it's all over, the better and stronger will be our families, community, and state.

### Food for an army, but no way to fix it?

You're stocking up with 2-6 weeks of food storage (ExEx13003). But if the utilities go off, how are you going to fix meals? This could happen, especially if a pandemic outbreak occurs during a snowstorm, ice storm, hurricane, or tornado and its aftermath. It may be that, due to employee absences from illness or deaths, utility companies will not be able to respond to outages and companies may be unable to deliver propane for cooking and/or heating.

Identify in your written family plan where the electric, gas, and water shut valves are in your residence. Teach family members how to shut off these valves; if you are unsure, call your utility company. If you turn the gas off, you must have a professional turn it back on.

Have on hand a supply of candles, matches, batteries, fuses, flashlights, propane canister or kerosene to fit your cooking equipment, and a generator if you can afford one. And be sure to have a fire extinguisher and know how to use it. Don't ignore it once you hang it up. Check the charge value on your fire extinguisher every 3 months.

Be careful when burning candles and NEVER use the oven to provide heat for the home.

### Cooking without power

You should have stored foods that do not require cooking, but there'll come a time when continued days of cold food may cause unnecessary stress for you and your family.

Take heart; there are many ways to cook when you do not have your oven, stove, or microwave:

1. Camp or fire pit (if it's not too cold to be outside)
2. Outdoor barbeque grill (gas or charcoal)
3. Camp stove
4. Stoves that use denatured alcohol

Never cook indoors with gas grills, camping stoves, or charcoal briquettes.

### Sanitation: keeping things clean

Leave all shoes at the door and be careful when bringing items into the home that may have been exposed to the influenza virus. If you have a dog or cat, keep them restrained to your yard and do not let them eat feces, dead animals, or roll in unidentified substances. Wash their paws with soap and water before they come in after being outside.

Practice respiratory hygiene as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control:

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm>

Thoroughly wash all dish and eating utensils with soap and hot water and sanitize after washing with a solution of one teaspoon 4-6% sodium hypochlorite (bleach) per gallon of water. If you must use cold water to wash dishes and utensils, rinse dishes with a solution of a tablespoon of 4-6% sodium hypochlorite per gallon of water.

Better yet, use the disposable utensils you stocked up ahead of time. They will be safer if someone is ill or if there is no hot water.

### Getting rid of the garbage

Many communities have or are developing pandemic flu plans and may have a plan for handling waste disposal in the event of an outbreak. Know your community plan, but also be prepared to handle waste yourself in the event of loss of services.

Separate garbage that will not spoil or decay from leftover foods, etc. Compost your garbage if you can. If

not, place in a plastic bag, seal it, and put into a watertight container. Dispose of it when the garbage trucks are running again.

Sickroom waste should be handled very carefully and kept separate from regular garbage. Double bag sickroom waste and store it away from animal access until regular pick-ups are available.

### No water, no toilet

If your toilets are not working you must create a makeshift toilet. With a little ingenuity and forethought, you can create one that protects health and safety and provides comfort for your family, one that children, animals, and/or insects do not have access to.

Decreasing the liquid from solid waste will decrease volume and making handling much easier. You can cover the waste with baking soda to aid in drying and to reduce odor.

Some makeshift models:

1. Use your own toilet. Flush the last water out and turn off the water at the toilet. Clean the bowl with your bleach and water. Line the toilet with two large heavy-duty garbage bags. Lower the lid between uses and dispose and replace the bags as needed. Be sure to properly wash your hands after disposing of the waste. Reline the toilet.

If you and your family members can urinate in a separate container the bags will last longer. Dispose of urine down a drain and flush with water you have stored.

2. Use a 5-gallon bucket fitted with a lid and follow procedure outlined above.
3. Purchase a ready-made potty and follow manufacturer's directions.

Be sure to wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after using or cleaning the makeshift toilets.

This publication can be accessed electronically from the SDSU College of Agriculture & Biological Sciences publications page at <http://agbiopubs.sdstate.edu/articles/ExEx13004.pdf> or from the Extension Service Avian Flu/Pandemic Flu Information Website at <http://sdces.sdstate.edu/avianflu/>