

For Immediate Release

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## **Emergency Preparedness and Food Preservation**

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department (SWNPHD) would like to remind everyone to use safe methods for preserving food. Food preservation can be a good addition to emergency food supplies since it is long-lasting. Using the right methods will protect everyone from foodborne illnesses that can happen from food that is preserved the wrong way.

“As fall approaches many folks are preparing to close out their garden harvests and visit the final farmers markets for the year,” explained Kay Schmidt, Emergency Response Coordinator at SWNPHD. “In the past few years, food preservation either by canning or freezing has become quite popular. Food preservation will extend the shelf life of meats and produce to place into your emergency supply kits, and it’s a great way to enjoy fruits and vegetables all year long from your garden.”

There are several methods that can be used in food preservation. When combined with proper techniques, these methods can provide a safe and fulfilling stock in your food supply. Some of the different methods include canning, drying, curing, smoking, freezing, pickling, and fermenting. Among these the most popular method today is still canning, either by water bath or pressure.

### **Canning:**

The canning method, if done properly, will destroy enzymes and remove oxygen from within the food. This will prevent the growth of bacteria, molds, or yeast. Botulism is a potentially deadly illness that is sometimes caused by bacteria that has the perfect environment to grow if canning is done incorrectly. The most common source of botulism is associated with low-acid foods such as most vegetables, some fruits, 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 comfortable with food preservation. Some high-acid foods are pickles, salsa, some fruits, jams and jellies, and tomatoes.

### **Storage:**

Once the food has been properly preserved there are also safe methods for storage and maintenance. Here are a few storage tips to keep in mind.

1. Label and date your jars.
2. Keep jars with other emergency food in a clean, cool, dark, dry place between 50 and 70°F. If you store jars at temperatures outside this range, the food inside can spoil.
3. Stack jars no more than two high so you don’t damage the seals.

4. If storing jars where they can freeze, wrap them in newspapers and blankets.
5. Remove, throw away, or use and replace any canned food and stored water before it expires.
  - a. Home-canned food usually needs to be thrown out after a year.
6. When storing safe water, it is best to use food-grade storage containers and to clean and sanitize the container before using it. Replace stored water every six months.

Remember that once a can is opened, the contents cannot be saved until later without proper refrigeration. For more information on how to preserve food safely, visit the Nebraska Extension's webpage for Food Preservation and Storage at [food.unl.edu/food-preservation-storage](http://food.unl.edu/food-preservation-storage).

Southwest Nebraska Public Health Department serves Chase, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Hayes, Hitchcock, Keith, Perkins, and Red Willow counties. The website [swhealth.ne.gov](http://swhealth.ne.gov) contains many resources and additional information helpful to prevent disease, promote and protect health. Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. For questions, call SWNPHD at 308-345-4223.

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