

Food Safety Advice

Clean: Wash Hands and Surfaces Often

Bacteria can be spread throughout the kitchen and get onto hands, cutting boards, utensils, counter tops, and food.

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food and after using the bathroom or changing diapers.
- Wash your hands after playing with pets or visiting petting zoos.
- Wash your cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops with hot soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go on to the next food.
- Consider using paper towels to clean up kitchen surfaces. If you use cloth towels wash them often in the hot cycle of your washing machine.
- Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten.
- Rub firm-skinned fruits and vegetables under running tap water or scrub with a clean vegetable brush while rinsing with running tap water.
- Keep books, backpacks, or shopping bags off the kitchen table or counters where food is prepared or served.

Separate: Don't Cross Contaminate

Cross-contamination is how bacteria can be spread. When handling raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs, keep these foods and their juices away from ready-to-eat foods. Always start with a clean scene — wash hands with warm water and soap. Wash cutting boards, dishes, countertops, and utensils with hot soapy water.

- Separate raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs from other foods in your grocery shopping cart, grocery bags, and in your refrigerator.
- Use one cutting board for fresh produce and a separate one for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Use a food thermometer, which measures the internal temperature of cooked meat, poultry, and egg dishes, to make sure that the food is cooked to a safe internal temperature.
- Never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, seafood, or eggs.

Cook: Cook to Proper Temperatures

Food is safely cooked when it reaches a high enough internal temperature to kill the harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness. Use a food thermometer to measure the internal temperature of cooked foods.

- Use a food thermometer, which measures the internal temperature of cooked meat, poultry, and egg dishes, to make sure that the food is cooked to a safe internal temperature.
- Cook beef roasts and steaks to a safe minimum internal temperature of 145°F. Cook pork to a minimum of 145°F. All poultry should reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F throughout the bird, as measured with a food thermometer.
- Cook all ground meat to 160°F. Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) links eating undercooked ground beef with a higher risk of illness. Remember, color is not a reliable indicator of doneness. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of your burgers.
- Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm, not runny. Don't use recipes in which eggs remain raw or only partially cooked. Casseroles and other dishes containing eggs should be cooked to 160°F.
- Cook fish to 145°F or until the flesh is opaque and separates easily with a fork.
- Make sure there are no cold spots in food (where bacteria can survive) when cooking in a microwave oven. For best results, cover food, stir and rotate for even cooking. If there is no turntable, rotate the dish by hand once or twice during cooking.
- Bring sauces, soups and gravy to a boil when reheating. Heat other leftovers thoroughly to 165°F.
- Use microwave-safe cookware and plastic wrap when cooking foods in a microwave oven.

Chill: Refrigerate Promptly!

Refrigerate foods quickly because cold temperatures slow the growth of harmful bacteria. Do not over-stuff the refrigerator. Cold air must circulate to help keep food safe. Keeping a constant refrigerator temperature of 40°F or below is one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of foodborne illness. Use an appliance thermometer to be sure the temperature is consistently 40°F or below. The freezer temperature should be 0°F or below.

- Refrigerate or freeze meat, poultry, eggs, and other perishables as soon as you get them home from the store.
- Never let raw meat, poultry, eggs, cooked food, or cut fresh fruits or vegetables sit at room temperature more than two hours before putting them in the refrigerator or freezer (one hour when the temperature is above 90°F).
- Never defrost food at room temperature. Food must be kept at a safe temperature during thawing. There are three safe ways to defrost food: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in the microwave using the defrost setting. Food thawed in cold water or in the microwave should be cooked immediately.
- Always marinate food in the refrigerator.
- Divide large amounts of leftovers into shallow containers for quicker cooling in the refrigerator.
- Use or discard refrigerated food on a regular basis.

Keeping Cold Lunches Cold

Prepare cooked food, such as turkey, ham, chicken, and vegetable or pasta salads, ahead of time to allow for thorough chilling in the refrigerator. Divide large amounts of food into shallow containers for fast chilling and easier use. Keep cooked food refrigerated until time to leave home.

To keep lunches cold away from home, include a small frozen gel pack or frozen juice box. Of course, if there's a refrigerator available, store perishable items there upon arrival. Insulated, soft-sided lunch boxes or bags are best for keeping food cold, but metal or plastic lunch boxes and paper bags can also be used. If using paper lunch bags, create layers by double bagging to help insulate the food.

Some food is safe without a cold source. Items that don't require refrigeration include whole fruits and vegetables, hard cheese, unopened canned meat and fish, chips, breads, crackers, peanut butter, jelly, mustard, and pickles.

Keeping Hot Lunches Hot

Use an insulated container to keep food like soup, chili, and stew hot. Fill the container with boiling water, let stand for a few minutes, empty, and then put in the piping hot food. Keep the insulated container closed until lunchtime to keep the food hot — 140°F or above.

For more information, visit the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS).