



Food Safety Fact Sheet

Health Education Facts

Bacteria in perishable foods can pose a serious health risk, especially to people in certain high-risk categories. These include the very young, the elderly, pregnant women (because of risk to the fetus), and people already weakened by serious illness or whose immune systems are weakened.

Identifying which foods require extra attention and using the proper handling, storage, cooking and cleaning methods are the only sure ways to prevent dangerous and possibly life-threatening infections.

High-risk foods

The following foods, if not properly stored, handled, and cooked are the most likely to contain dangerous bacteria:

- Any meat, poultry or seafood product; or foods containing them.
- Soy protein, tofu and other moist soy protein products; or foods containing them.
- Milk, sour cream, eggs and soft cheeses such as cottage, ricotta, Brie and cream cheese; or foods containing them. Hard cheeses, while not as easily contaminated as soft cheeses, also bear watching.
- Salad dressings; or foods containing them.
- Liquid non dairy creamer
- Cooked pasta and rice
- Cooked vegetables
- Sauces and oil products
- Seed sprouts, cut melon, and cut leafy greens

Handling

Pay attention to 'use by' and 'sell by' dates at the grocery store. Note that these dates refer to the quality of the food and are not a guarantee of an uncontaminated product.

Make sure that packaging is not punctured or cut and that packaging seals are in place and secure. Don't purchase or use commercially canned foods if the can is dented or bulged, if it shows signs of seepage, or if it has an off-odor or foams when opened.

Ensure that dairy products have been pasteurized.

Select perishable food products, especially meat, last before checking out, and place them in the coolest place in your car during the trip home. When possible, have raw meat bagged separately in plastic bags to contain possible leakage.

Storage

Bacteria multiply rapidly between 41°F and 135°F. Remember to keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot:

- Set your refrigerator at 36°F or colder; set your freezer at 0°F or below. For best quality, store frozen raw ground meats no more than three to four months; frozen cooked meats, two to three months.
- Place ground meat and poultry in the refrigerator (for defrosting) or freezer immediately upon arrival.

Frozen foods must be kept frozen. If you think the food may have thawed, look for ice crystals in the food before you place it in the freezer. Ice crystals in food mean it is still frozen and may be regarded as safe.

Defrost frozen ground meats in the refrigerator—never at room temperature. Don't let raw ground meat or poultry juices touch ready-to-eat foods. Store properly wrapped raw poultry on the lowest shelf in a refrigerator when defrosting.

Keep uncooked ground meat and poultry in the refrigerator only one or two days before cooking or freezing. Use "first in, first out" method.

For rapid defrosting, seal meat by itself in a water-tight plastic bag and place it in a sink of cold running water. Check food temperature every 20 minutes. It should not exceed 41°F.

During power outages, food will remain frozen for up to 48 hours in a closed freezer without power; 24 hours in a closed refrigerator. If food remains above 41°F for more than two hours, don't take chances; throw it away. Avoid opening refrigerator and freezer doors during power outages.

Don't refreeze thawed food. However, you can cook raw meat that was partially thawed and then refreeze it. Ice crystals in food mean that it is still frozen and may be regarded as safe.

Cleaning

Keep everything clean—hands, utensils, counters, cutting boards, sinks, refrigerators and freezers. That way, food will stay as safe as possible.

Use hot water, detergent, and sanitizer to clean counters, cutting boards and other surfaces raw ground meats or poultry have touched. If possible, use separate cutting boards for raw and cooked meats.

Wash hands thoroughly in hot soapy water before preparing foods and after handling raw meat.

Wash, rinse, and sanitize utensils (including brushes) that have touched raw meat before using them for cooked meats and other foods.

Run pots, pans, and utensils through the dishwasher so they are thoroughly cleaned and sanitized. For manual cleaning and sanitizing, wash in hot detergent water, rinse in hot clean water and immerse in a sanitizing solution.

Replace dishwasher in a sink regularly when washing dishes. Don't allow the water to become too greasy; bacteria can multiply in dirty dishwasher, even with soap.

When dish washing equipment is out of service, use paper plates, cups, plastic utensils, etc. Remember to use separate plates and utensils for raw and cooked foods.

Follow the instructions for disassembling, cleaning and sanitizing slicers, mixers, food processors and other preparation equipment.

Wash raw vegetables well with clean, potable water.

Cooking

Cooking kills harmful bacteria. Never eat raw meat, poultry, or eggs or drink unpasteurized milk.

Ground meats should be cooked until no pink color remains in the center, and the juices should run clear. The center should reach 155°F for at least 15 seconds.

During broiling, grilling or cooking on the stove, turn meats over at least once.

Don't partially cook a turkey or roast one night and then "finish" it the next day. Bacteria will multiply overnight when the food cools below cooking temperature.

Avoid very low oven temperature roasting methods (below 300°F) and long or overnight cooking of meats, which may encourage bacterial growth before cooking is complete. Do not use brown paper bags for roasting; they may not be sanitary and are not recommended for use as cooking material.

Cook the stuffing for whole turkey and chicken separately. Unstuffed birds will cook thoroughly more easily.

Avoid mixing dark sauces (such as Worcestershire and teriyaki) with raw ground meat or poultry as they make it more difficult to judge if a product is "done." Basting liquids should reach the same cooking temperature as the meat.

Avoid using the same basting instrument on different foods.

When marinating meat, seafood, or poultry, use a covered, non-metallic container and place it in the refrigerator. Ingredients in marinades such as wine, vinegar and lemon juice are acidic and will cause a chemical reaction with some metals. When this happens, metal will leach in to the food being marinated.

Cook eggs until the yoke and white are firm. Avoid keeping eggs out of the refrigerator for more than 2 hours. Use raw shell eggs within 5 weeks and hard cooked eggs within 1 week.

Check all final internal product cooking temperatures with a clean and sanitized thermometer. Ground meat patties and loaves are safe when they reach 155°F (for 15 seconds) in the center; ground poultry patties and loaves should reach 165°F.

To reheat precooked foods, cover and heat to 165°F. Home-canned meats and vegetables should be boiled 15-20 minutes.

Do not let foods stand at room temperature. After cooking, keep them hot at 135°F or higher. Or, chill cooked foods to reach 41°F or below within two hours after cooking. Use cooked meat and poultry stored in the refrigerator within one or two days. Don't put cooked foods on the same plate that held raw meat.

After serving, refrigerate unused portions immediately in shallow containers. Ground meat and ground poultry products should be no deeper than two inches in the container.

Direct sneezes and coughs away from food; cover mouth and nose with tissue when sneeze or coughing; wash hands after sneezing or coughing.

We can't see, smell, or taste dangerous bacteria which may be lurking in our food. Knowing which foods are the most likely to cause problems, as well as following these guidelines, are the only ways to make our food safe.