

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



Department of Health & Human Services

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Food Safety at Home

What are the basics of food safety?

Bacteria that can cause foodborne illness cannot be seen, smelled or tasted. Follow these four easy steps - **Clean, Separate, Cook, Chill** - to help prevent harmful bacteria from making your family sick.

Clean: Wash hands and food preparation 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.
- Wash surfaces that come in contact with food. Use hot, soapy water and rinse with clear water.
- To sanitize surfaces use unscented bleach or chlorine products. Follow directions on the label.
- Change dishcloths daily or after contact with raw meat, poultry or fish. Consider using paper towels and throw out after use.
- Clean can-opener blade(s) often to remove food particles that can grow bacteria. Rinse fresh fruits and vegetable under running water, even those with skin or rind that won't be eaten.

Separate: Don't cross contaminate. Keep raw meat, poultry and fish away from ready-to-eat foods.

- Separate raw meat, poultry, fish and eggs from other foods in your grocery cart, grocery bags and in the refrigerator.
- Use one cutting board for raw meat, poultry and fish, and another for fresh produce and ready-to-eat foods.
- Store raw meat, poultry and fish on a plate or on a low shelf in the refrigerator so juices do not drip on ready-to-eat foods.
- Never place cooked food on a plate that had raw meat, poultry or fish on it.
- Wash canvas and cloth reusable grocery bags in the washing machine with hot, soapy water.

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Cook: Foods are safely cooked when they are heated for a long enough time, and to a high enough temperature to kill harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness.

- Use a clean food thermometer to check cooking temperatures. Do not rely on how food looks to be sure it is fully cooked.
- Place the thermometer in the thickest part of the food. When checking meat or poultry, make sure the thermometer does not touch bones or fat.
- Cook beef, veal, lamb, steak and roast to 145 °F; all cuts of pork to 160 °F; ground beef, veal or lamb to 160°F; egg dishes to 160 °F; whole, pieces, ground or stuffed poultry to 165 °F; and reheat leftovers to 165 °F.
- Cook fish until it is opaque and flakes easily with a fork.
- Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm. Do not use recipes in which eggs remain raw or are only partially cooked.
- When cooking in a microwave oven cover the food, stir, and rotate once or twice during cooking to avoid cold spots where bacteria can survive. Use a food thermometer to make sure foods have reached a safe internal temperature.
- Keep hot foods at 140 °F or above.

Chill: At room temperature, bacteria in food can double every 20 minutes. The more bacteria, the greater the chance of getting sick. Refrigerate foods quickly to keep most harmful bacteria from multiplying.

- Check the temperature of the refrigerator and freezer with an appliance thermometer. The refrigerator should be at 40 °F or below and the freezer at 0 °F or below. Do not over-stuff the refrigerator.
- Refrigerate or freeze meat, poultry, eggs and other perishables as soon as you get home from the store.
- Foods are no longer safe to eat when they have been in the temperature danger zone of 40 °F to 140 °F for more than 2 hours, or 1 hour when the temperature is 90 °F.
- Never thaw food at room temperature. The refrigerator is the safest place to thaw food. Make sure meat juices do not drip on other foods. For faster thawing, put food in a strainer under cold, running water (allow sink to drain).
- Food can be thawed in the microwave but must be cooked immediately after thawing.
- Refrigerate foods while they are marinating. Do not re-use marinade to baste food while cooking.
- Refrigerate leftover foods right away. Divide large amounts of leftovers into shallow containers for quicker cooling in the refrigerator.
- Keep cold foods at 40 °F or below.

**For more information on Food Safety at Home, call
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