

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



Department of Health & Human Services

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Food Safety at Home

What are the basics of food safety?

Follow these steps for food handling, cooking and storage to prevent foodborne illness:

- Wash hands with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds. Dry thoroughly.
- Clean work surfaces often, especially when changing food preparation processes.
- Keep foods separated – store raw, animal foods away from ready to eat or cooked food.
- Cook foods to proper temperatures.
- Refrigerate left over foods right away.

What is the best way to clean kitchen surfaces?

- Wash surfaces that come into contact with food, with hot, soapy water, then rinse with clean water.
- Bleach and chlorine products can be used to sanitize surfaces. Use these according to their label.
- Never use sponges to clean kitchen surfaces as they are difficult to clean and may breed germs.
- Change dishcloths daily or after contact with raw, animal foods or use paper towels and throw out after each use.
- Clean can-opener blade(s) often to remove food particles that can grow bacteria.

When storing food what is the best way to keep it safe?

- Refrigerate perishable, raw, cooked or frozen foods, that have been at room temperature for less than 2 hours. Refrigerate food within 1 hour when the outside temperature is above 90° F.
- Never leave food out at room temperature for more than 2 hours. Throw out food that has been at room temperature for more than 2 hours.
- Check the temperature of your refrigerator and freezer with a thermometer. The refrigerator should be at 40° F or below and the freezer should be at 0° F or below.
- Prevent meat juices from dripping onto other food. Place raw, animal foods (such as eggs, raw chicken, raw hamburger) in watertight containers or on trays to prevent dripping onto other food.
- Select the lowest shelf or drawer in the refrigerator to store raw meats and eggs to prevent cross-contamination.
- Generally, high acid, unopened, canned foods (such as tomatoes, grapefruit and pineapple) can be stored for 12 to 18 months. Low acid, unopened, canned food (such as meat, poultry, fish and most vegetables) can be stored 2 to 5 years. Throw out cans that are dented, leaking, bulging, or rusted.

What is the safest way to thaw frozen food?

- Never thaw food at room temperature.
- The refrigerator is the safest place to thaw food. Make sure meat juices do not drip onto other food.
- For faster thawing, put food in a strainer under cold, running water (allow sink to drain).
- Thawing can be done in a microwave oven. Cook food immediately after thawing in a microwave.

When cooking food, what is the best way to keep it safe?

- Always wash hands with soap and hot water for at least 20 seconds, before and after handling food.
- Avoid cross-contamination. Keep raw meats and their juices away from other foods. After cutting raw meats wash hands, cutting board, knife and countertop with hot, soapy water.
- Refrigerate foods while they are marinating. Do not re-use marinade to baste food while cooking.
- Cook ground meats to 155° F; ground poultry to 165° F; beef, veal, roasts, chops, shellfish, eggs, wild game (such as venison steaks or chops) to 145° F; all cuts of fresh pork to 155° F; whole poultry, chicken and any stuffed meat product to 165° F.
- To be sure food has been cooked to the proper temperature, place a thermometer in the thickest part of the food and in at least two other places to be sure the entire product has reached the proper temperature.
- Use a clean food thermometer to check cooking temperatures. Do not rely on how food looks to be sure it is fully cooked. Use either a digital thermometer or a dial thermometer that is scaled 0-220° F, to check foods in the refrigerator or cooking temperature of foods.

When serving food, what is the best way to keep it safe?

- Keep hot food at 140° F or warmer and cold food at 40° F or colder.
- When serving food at a buffet, keep food hot with chafing dishes, slow cookers, or warming trays. Keep foods cold by nesting dishes in ice or use small serving trays and replace them often.
- Throw out any food left at room temperature for more than 2 hours; 1 hour if outside air temperature is above 90° F.
- Place leftover food in shallow containers and immediately put in the refrigerator or freezer. Use cooked leftovers within 4 days.

For more information on Food Safety at Home, call

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