

Food Safety and Foodborne Diseases

There are many disease-causing agents, such as bacteria, viruses, and parasites that can be spread by food. Foodborne illness is estimated to result in as many as 48 million cases of disease in the United States each year.

Disease-causing organisms may be present on products when purchased. Raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs should be considered contaminated. Fresh produce such as tomatoes, lettuce, potatoes, or strawberries may also have organisms present. Foods can become cross-contaminated with organisms transferred from raw products, meat juices, or other contaminated products. A food handler's hands, if not kept clean, can also contaminate the food.

How to prevent foodborne diseases:

Clean:

Wash hands, utensils, and cutting boards before and after contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs.

- Wash your hands with soap and water for 20 seconds. Wash your hands before touching food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or touching pets.
- Wash cutting boards, counters, dishes, and utensils with hot, soapy water. Do this after working with each food item.
- Use paper towels to clean up kitchen surfaces. If you use cloth towels, wash them often in the hot cycle of the washing machine or in hot, soapy water.

Separate:

Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and their juices away from ready-to-eat foods such as fruits and vegetables.

- Keep these foods away from each other in your shopping cart and in your fridge.
- Use a separate cutting board for raw meat products and ready-to-eat foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Wash your hands after touching raw meat, poultry, or seafood. Wash cutting boards, surfaces, and utensils with hot, soapy water.
- Never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, or seafood.

Cook:

Use a food thermometer - you can't tell food is cooked safely by how it looks!

- Use a food thermometer that measures the internal temperature of cooked meat, poultry and egg dishes to make sure food is cooked to a safe internal temperature.
- Cook roasts and steaks to at least 145°F.
- Whole poultry should reach 165°F.
- Cook ground meats to at least 160°F.
- Cook eggs until the yolk and whites are firm. Avoid using recipes in which eggs remain raw or are partly cooked.
- Cooked fish should flake easily with a fork.

Chill:

Refrigerate foods quickly because cold temperatures slow the growth of harmful, disease-causing pathogens.

- Set your fridge to 40°F or colder. The freezer should be kept at 0°F. Check the readings once a month with a fridge thermometer.
- Put all cooked and leftover food in the fridge or freezer within two hours.
- Never thaw food by simply taking it out of the fridge! There are three safe ways to thaw food:
 - In the refrigerator
 - Under cold, running water
 - In the microwave according to directions for the food
- Marinate foods in the refrigerator.
- Divide large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow dishes with covers so they can cool quickly in the refrigerator.
- Don't pack the refrigerator too full. The cool air must flow freely to keep food safe.

Sickness:

If you have been sick with diarrhea or vomiting, do not prepare food for at least 24 hours after your symptoms have stopped. Remember to also cover your cough and wash your hands before returning to food preparation.