

DECEMBER IS FOOD SAFETY AWARENESS MONTH

Cleanliness is the Key to Staying Well

The most important thing to do to protect yourself from getting sick from food is to always wash your hands before you prepare food, before you serve food, and before you eat food. Hands should be washed with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds which is about the amount of time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice in your head. If you are preparing food, be sure to cover your hair with a scarf, net, or hat, and cover any open sores and cuts to the hands. It is also important to keep your prep area clean and uncluttered. Dishcloths should also be kept clean since when they are wet, they can harbor bacteria. Dishcloths should be washed frequently in hot water in a washing machine if possible. Choose cutting boards that are smooth and made of hard maple or a non-porous material such as plastic. The cutting board should be free of cracks and crevices and should be washed in hot, soapy water with a scrub brush and then sanitized in a dishwasher or with a solution of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach to 1 quart of water. Be sure to wash and sanitize cutting boards before using them for ready-to-eat foods and after using them for raw foods. Another good idea is to wash the lids of canned foods before opening them to keep dirt away from the food.



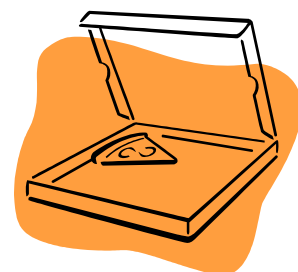
Wash Fruits and Vegetables Before Eating



Always wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly before eating. To do this, rinse them under running water without soap or other detergents. If necessary, use a small scrub brush to remove surface dirt. Be sure to remove the outer leaves of a head of lettuce or cabbage and discard. It is very easy for bacteria to grow on the cut surface of fruits and vegetables, so be extremely careful to avoid contaminating these foods when using a cutting board. It is a good idea to have a separate cutting board for raw meats and for vegetables. Also, avoid leaving fruits and vegetables that have been cut at room temperature for several hours.

Leftovers-Are They Safe to Eat?

How many times have you been out to eat and went to a movie or ran an errand while your leftovers sat in the car? Did you ever wonder if it is safe to eat your leftovers after being unrefrigerated for so long? It is important to refrigerate or freeze your leftovers within two hours or sooner. Cold temperatures keep harmful bacteria from growing and multiplying. Divide large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator. And be sure to not over pack the refrigerator. Cool air must circulate to keep food safe. When you reheat leftovers, they must be heated to at least 165°F. If the item had been frozen, remember to never defrost the food at room temperature. Foods should be thawed in the refrigerator, under cold running water, or in the microwave. After three days, leftovers should be thrown away that are stored in the refrigerator.

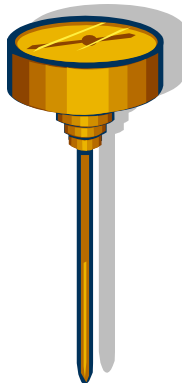


Be Sure to Check the Temp!

Temperature plays a crucial role in proper food safety. The best way to make sure cooked food is safe is to use a digital or dial food thermometer to be sure that foods are completely cooked. You should insert the thermometer into the center of the food for at least 30 seconds to get an accurate reading. See the Proper

Temperature box to the right for a list of

the appropriate temperatures. Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm and avoid recipes where eggs remain raw or partially cooked. Fish should be opaque and flake easily with a fork. If you are cooking in a microwave, be sure that there are no cold spots in the food. For best results, cover the food, stir, and rotate it for even cooking. Also, be sure to bring sauces, soups, and gravy to a boil when reheating.



Proper Temperature:

- | Whole Poultry--180°F
- | Poultry Breasts--170°F
- | Cooked Meats (Hot Dogs)--165°F
- | Ground Poultry Burgers--165°F
- | Ground Beef Burgers--160°F
- | All Cuts of Pork--160°F
- | Beef, Veal, & Lamb Steaks--145°F
- | Roasts and Chops--145°F
- | Leftovers--165°F

Winter Food Safety

In the event of a storm that knocks out the power to your home, keep the doors to the refrigerator and freezer closed as much as possible. Every time the door opens, cold air escapes. When the power returns, you should discard any refrigerated food items that are warmer than 40°F. Generally, refrigerated foods should be safe as long as power is out no more than four hours, but a thermometer should be used to be sure that the food is not warmer than 40°F. If frozen foods have begun to thaw but are at 40°F or below, be sure to cook or refreeze them as soon as possible. Always remember to throw food away based on temperature, not the way it looks or smells and never taste food that you think may be bad. It is important to clean the inside of the refrigerator and freezer after spoiled or thawed foods is taken out with soap and water and then a bleach solution.



Never store food outside even if the temperatures are cold. The food can be exposed to the sun's rays which could cause frozen foods to melt and refrigerated foods to become too warm. Also, the temperature outside can change frequently and if the temperature is cold enough to keep frozen foods frozen, then it is too cold for refrigerated foods. Storing food outside can be dangerous due to unsanitary conditions and food being exposed to animals that pass by.

Resources:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Bacterial and Mycotic Diseases:
<http://www.cdc.gov>
- United States Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Services:
<http://www.fsis.usda.gov>
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition:
<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov>

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