

Food Safety Zone

Why worry about food safety? Because most illnesses reported from “bad food” are caused by bacterial contamination. Nearly all cases can be linked to improper food handling in our homes, supermarkets and restaurants—that means they could have been prevented. Keeping food safe to eat is easy, if you stay in the safety zone by remembering these tips.

Keep Everything Clean



Proper hand washing could eliminate nearly half of all cases of food-borne illness. Experts recommend washing hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before handling food—the time it takes

to sing the “Happy Birthday” song.

Wash all utensils and surfaces with hot, soapy water after contact with raw meat, poultry, fish or seafood. Use paper towels when working with—and cleaning up after working with—raw poultry, meat, fish or seafood.

Keep Cold Foods Cold

Food that is supposed to be cold should be kept in the refrigerator or freezer. Never thaw foods at room temperature. Thaw foods only in the

refrigerator or microwave following manufacturer’s directions. If you thaw foods in the microwave, cook them immediately.

Keep Hot Foods Hot



Bacteria grow at room temperature or in lukewarm food. Hot foods can’t be left at room temperature for more than 2 hours, including preparation time. Keeping hot foods hot means keeping them at 140°F or higher.

Keep cooked foods hot, or refrigerate them until ready to serve, including carryout foods. Reheat leftovers, stirring often, until “steaming” hot (165°F). Using a cover while reheating helps leftovers get hot in the center and holds moisture.

Don’t Cross-contaminate



Cross-contamination happens when cooked or ready-to-eat foods pick up bacteria from other foods, hands, cutting boards and utensils. Always

keep raw meat, poultry, fish, shellfish and eggs separate from other foods.

- Don’t chop fresh produce or any food that won’t be fully cooked on a cutting board that was used for raw poultry, meat, fish or seafood without cleaning it with soap first.
- Wash any knives or utensils that were used in hot, soapy water, too.

Pitch It!

Do not taste leftover food that looks or smells strange to see if it’s okay. When in doubt, throw it out!

For more information about safe food handling and food-borne illness, browse the following U.S. government websites; Gateway to Government Food Safety: <http://www.foodsafety.gov>, FDA/Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition: <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov>, USDA/FDA Foodborne Illness Education Information Center: <http://www.nal.usda.gov/foodsafety>