

United States Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service

Cooking for Groups

A Volunteer's Guide to Food Safety





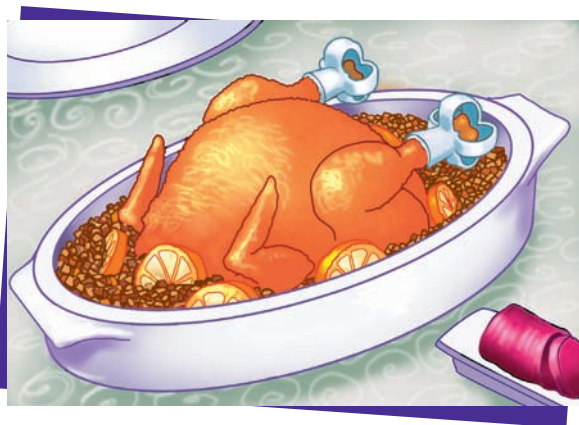
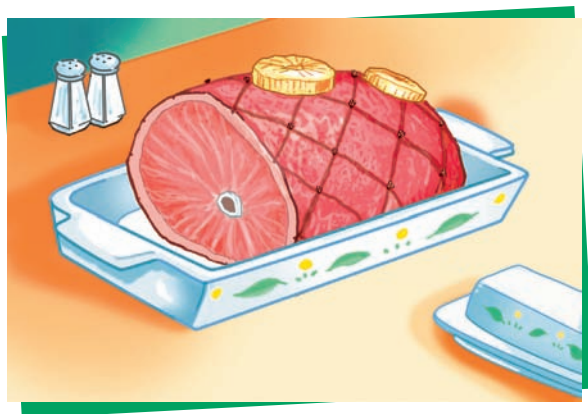
United States Department of Agriculture

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Introduction

This brochure was developed to help volunteers prepare and serve food safely for large groups such as family reunions, church dinners, and community gatherings. This food may be prepared at the volunteer's home and brought to the event, or prepared and served at the gathering.

The information provided in this publication was developed as a guide for consumers who are preparing food for large groups.

For additional information, and to ensure that all state regulations or recommendations for food preparation and service are followed, please contact your local or state health department.

Food service personnel should be aware that this guide was prepared for consumer use only. The information provided in this guide does not reflect recommendations in the FDA Food Code, or your state's food code. Food service personnel should contact their local or state health department for information on the rules and regulations governing the preparation of food in retail or institutional settings.

Food that is mishandled can cause very serious consequences for all, especially for "at-risk" groups—infants, young children, older adults, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems. For this reason it is important that volunteers be especially careful when preparing and serving food to large groups.

Foodborne Illness: What You Need To Know

What Is Foodborne Illness?

Foodborne illness, or food poisoning, often presents itself as flu-like symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or fever, so many people may not recognize that the illness may be caused by bacteria or other pathogens in food.

Thousands of types of bacteria are naturally present in our environment. Not all bacteria cause disease in humans. For example, some bacteria are used beneficially in making cheese and yogurt.

Bacteria that cause disease are called pathogens. When certain pathogens enter the food supply, they can cause foodborne illness. Millions of cases of foodborne illness occur each year and most can be prevented. Proper cooking or processing of food destroys bacteria.

Age and physical condition place some persons at higher risk than others, no matter what type of bacteria is implicated. Infants and young children, pregnant women and their unborn babies, and older adults are at higher risk for foodborne illness, as are people with weakened immune systems (such as those with HIV/AIDS, cancer, diabetes, kidney disease, and transplant patients). Some persons may become ill after ingesting only a few harmful bacteria; others may remain symptom free after ingesting thousands.

How Bacteria Get in Food

Bacteria may be present on products when you purchase them. Plastic-wrapped boneless chicken and ground meat, for example, were once part of live chickens or cattle. Raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs are not sterile. Neither is fresh produce such as lettuce, tomatoes, sprouts, and melons.

Foods, including safely cooked, ready-to-eat foods, can become cross-contaminated with bacteria transferred from raw products, meat juices or other contaminated products, or from food handlers with poor personal hygiene.

In Case of Suspected Foodborne Illness

Follow these general guidelines:

- Preserve the evidence. If a portion of the suspect food is available, wrap it securely, mark “DANGER,” and freeze it. Save all the packaging materials, such as cans or cartons. Write down the food type, the date, other identifying marks on the package, the time consumed, and when the onset of symptoms occurred. Save any identical unopened products.
- Seek treatment as necessary. If the victim is in an “at-risk” group, seek medical care immediately. Likewise, if symptoms persist or are severe (such as bloody diarrhea, excessive nausea and vomiting, or high temperature), call your doctor.
- Call the local health department if the suspect food was served at a large gathering, from a restaurant or other foodservice facility, or if it is a commercial product.
- Call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline if the suspect food is a USDA-inspected product at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854). Also contact “Ask Karen,” FSIS’ virtual representative, at Askkaren.gov (available in English and Spanish).

Food Safe Families - Check Your Steps

When preparing for your special event, remember that there may be an invisible enemy ready to strike. It's called BAC (bacteria) and it can make you sick. This problem is more serious than many people realize. In fact, one in six Americans will get sick from food poisoning this year alone. But by following four simple steps, you can protect your families and friends and keep your food safe.

Clean—Wash hands and surfaces often.

Separate—Separate raw meats from other foods.

Cook—Cook to the right temperature.

Chill—Refrigerate food promptly.

Food Safe Families is a consumer education campaign created to promote safe food handling as a way to help reduce the number of cases of foodborne illness—a serious but often unrecognized public health issue.

You can check your steps and learn more about Food Safe Families at foodsafety.gov.



When You Plan

Select a reliable person to be in charge. The person-in-charge should contact the local health department for information about the rules and regulations governing preparation and serving of food for groups. The person-in-charge should provide instructions to the volunteers, answer questions, and oversee the preparation, service, and cleanup of the event.

Make sure you have the right equipment, including cutting boards, utensils, food thermometers, cookware, shallow containers for storage, soap, and paper towels.

For outdoor events, make sure you have a source of clean water. If none is available at the site, bring water for cleaning of hands, utensils, and food thermometers. Develop a plan for transporting equipment for cleanup after the event.

Plan ahead to ensure that there will be adequate storage space in the refrigerator and freezer.

When You Shop

Do not purchase canned goods that are dented, leaking, bulging, or rusted. These are the warning signs that dangerous bacteria may be growing in the can.

Separate raw meat, poultry, and seafood from other foods in your grocery shopping cart and in your refrigerator.

Buy cold foods last. Plan to drive directly home from the grocery store. You may want to take a cooler with ice or frozen gel packs for perishables. Always refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours. Refrigerate within 1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F.

When You Store Food

Make sure the temperature in the refrigerator is 40 °F or below and 0 °F or below in the freezer. Check these temperatures with an appliance thermometer.



Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared foods, and leftovers within 2 hours (1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F) of shopping or preparing. Place raw meat, poultry, and seafood in containers in the refrigerator, to prevent their juices from dripping on other foods. Raw juices may contain harmful bacteria. Refer to the cold storage chart on page 27 for recommended storage times in the refrigerator or freezer.

When You Prepare Food

Wash hands and surfaces often. Bacteria can be spread throughout the kitchen and get onto cutting boards, utensils, and counter tops. To prevent this:

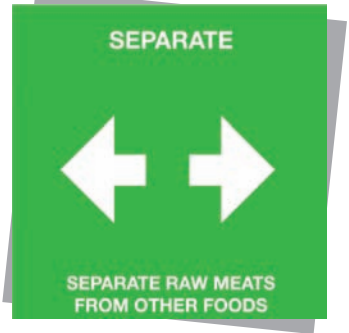


- Wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds before and after handling food, and after using the bathroom, changing diapers, or handling pets.
- Use paper towels or clean cloths to wipe up kitchen surfaces or spills. Wash cloths often in the hot cycle of your washing machine.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops with hot, soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go on to the next item. A solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach in 1 gallon of water may be used to sanitize washed surfaces and utensils.



When cutting boards are used:

- Always use a clean cutting board.
- Use one cutting board for fresh produce and a separate one for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Once cutting boards become excessively worn or develop hard-to-clean grooves, you should replace them.



Never thaw food at room temperature. Thaw food:

- In the refrigerator.
- In the microwave, but cook the food immediately.

Food may also be thawed in cold water. Be sure that the sink or container that holds food is clean before submerging food.

Two methods may be used when thawing:

- Completely submerge airtight wrapped package. Change water every 30 minutes.
- Completely submerge airtight wrapped food in constantly running cold water.

Cook food immediately after thawing.

Marinades may be used to tenderize or add flavor to food. When using marinades:

- Always marinate food in the refrigerator, not on the counter.
- Use food-grade plastic, stainless steel, or glass containers to marinate food.
- Sauce that is used to marinate raw meat, poultry, fish or seafood should not be used on cooked foods, unless it is boiled before applying.
- Never reuse marinades for other foods unless you boil them first. (see Page 15)

Discard any leftover batter, or breading, after it has come in contact with raw food.

It is recommended that you cook stuffing in a casserole. If stuffing poultry, stuff just before roasting and use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the stuffing. The stuffing must reach 165 °F.

Rinse all fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water before use. Thick-skinned produce may be scrubbed with a brush. Do not use soap.

Food should not be tasted until it reaches a safe minimum internal temperature. Refer to internal cooking temperature chart on page 14 for the recommended safe temperatures. Use a clean utensil each time you taste food, otherwise you may contaminate the food.

Do not use a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, or seafood unless the plate has first been washed in hot, soapy water.

When You Cook

Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of meat, poultry, casseroles, and other food. Check the temperature in several places to make sure the food is evenly heated. Wash the thermometer with hot, soapy water after use.

Several types of thermometers are available, including:

- **Oven-safe**—insert 2 to 2 1/2 inches deep in the thickest part of the food, at the beginning of the cooking time. It remains there throughout cooking and is not appropriate for thin food.



- **Dial instant-read**—not designed to stay in the food during cooking. Insert probe the full length of the sensing area, usually 2 to 2 1/2 inches. If measuring the temperature of a thin food, such as a hamburger patty or boneless chicken breast, insert probe sideways with the sensing device in the center. About 15 to 20 seconds are required for the temperature to be accurately displayed.



- **Digital instant-read**—not designed to stay in the food during cooking. The heat sensing device is in the tip of the probe. Place the tip of the probe in the center of the thickest part of the food, at least 1/2 inch deep. About 10 seconds are required for the temperature to be accurately displayed.

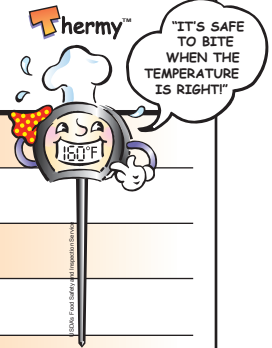


Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures and Cooking Guidelines

Product	°F
Egg & Egg Dishes	
Eggs	Cook until yolk & white are firm.
Egg dishes	160
Egg sauces, custards	160
Ground Meat & Meat Mixtures	
Turkey, Chicken	165
Beef, Veal, Lamb, Pork	160
Fresh Beef, Veal, Lamb and Pork	
Steaks, Roasts, and Chops	145 with a 3-minute rest time after removing from the heat source.
Ham	
Fresh (raw)	145 with a 3-minute rest time
Fully cooked (to reheat)	140
Roast Beef	
Cooked commercially, vacuum sealed, and ready-to-eat	140



Product	°F
Poultry	
All products	165
Stuffing	
Cooked alone or in bird	165
Sauces, Soups, Gravies, Marinades	
Used with raw meat, poultry, or fish	Bring to a boil.
Seafood	145
Fin Fish	Cook until opaque and flakes easily with a fork.
Shrimp, lobster, crab	Should turn red and flesh should become pearly opaque.
Scallops	Should turn milky white or opaque and firm.
Clams, mussels, oysters	Cook until shells open.
Leftovers & Casseroles	165



Note: These temperatures are recommended for consumer cooking. They are not intended for processing, institutional, or foodservice preparation. Foodservice workers should consult their state or local food code, or health department.

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