Food Safety Information



Basics for Handling Food Safely

Safe steps in food handling, cooking, and storage are essential to prevent foodborne illness. You can't see, smell, or taste harmful bacteria that may cause illness. In every step of food preparation, follow the four steps of the Food Safe Families campaign to keep food safe:

- Clean Wash hands and surfaces often.
- Separate Don't cross-contaminate.
- Cook Cook to the right temperature.
- Chill Refrigerate promptly.

Shopping

- Purchase refrigerated or frozen items after selecting your non-perishables.
- Never choose meat or poultry in packaging that is torn or leaking.
- Do not buy food past "Sell-By," "Use-By," or other expiration dates.

Storage

- Always refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours--1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F (32.2 °C).
- Check the temperature of your refrigerator and freezer with an appliance thermometer. The refrigerator should be at 40 °F (4.4 °C) or below and the freezer at 0 °F (-17.7 °C) or below.
- Cook or freeze fresh poultry, fish, ground meats, and variety meats within 2 days; other beef, veal, lamb, or pork, within 3 to 5 days.
- Perishable food such as meat and poultry should be wrapped securely to maintain quality and to prevent meat juices from getting onto other food.
- To maintain quality when freezing meat and poultry in its original package, wrap the package again with foil or plastic wrap that is recommended for the freezer.
- Canned foods are safe indefinitely as long as they are not exposed to freezing temperatures, or temperatures above 90 °F. (32.2 °C) If the cans look ok, they are safe to use. Discard cans that are dented, rusted, or swollen. Highacid canned food (tomatoes, fruits) will keep their best quality for 12 to 18 months; low-acid canned food (meats, vegetables) for 2 to 5 years.

Preparation

- Always wash hands before and after handling food.
- Don't cross-contaminate. Keep raw meat, poultry, fish, and their juices away from other food. After cutting raw meats, wash hands, cutting board, knife, and counter tops with hot, soapy water.
- Marinate meat and poultry in a covered dish in the refrigerator.
- Sanitize cutting boards by using a solution of 1 teaspoon chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water.

Thawing

- Refrigerator: The refrigerator allows slow, safe thawing. Make sure thawing meat and poultry juices do not drip onto other food.
- **Cold Water**: For faster thawing, place food in a leak-proof plastic bag. Submerge in cold tap water. Change the water every 30 minutes. Cook immediately after thawing.
- Microwave: Cook meat and poultry immediately after microwave thawing.

Cooking

- Cook all raw beef, pork, lamb and veal steaks, chops, and roasts to a minimum internal temperature of 145 °F (62.8 °C) as measured with a food thermometer before removing meat from the heat source. For safety and quality, allow meat to rest for at least three minutes before carving or consuming. For reasons of personal preference, consumers may choose to cook meat to higher temperatures.
- Ground meat: Cook all raw ground beef, pork, lamb, and veal to an internal temperature of 160 °F (71.1 °C) as measured with a food thermometer.
- Poultry: Cook all poultry to an internal temperature of 165 °F (73.9 °C) as measured with a food thermometer.

Serving

- Hot food should be held at 140 °F (60 °C) or warmer.
- Cold food should be held at 40 °F (4.4 °C) or colder.
- When serving food at a buffet, keep food hot with chafing dishes, slow cookers, and warming trays. Keep food cold by nesting dishes in bowls of ice or use small serving trays and replace them often.
- Perishable food should not be left out more than 2 hours at room temperature--1 hour when the temperature is above 90 °F (32.2 °C).

Leftovers

- Discard any food left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours--1 hour if the temperature was above 90 °F (32.2 °C).
- Place food into shallow containers and immediately put in the refrigerator or freezer for rapid cooling.
- Use cooked leftovers within 4 days.
- Reheat leftovers to 165 °F (73.9 °C).

Refreezing

Meat and poultry defrosted in the refrigerator may be refrozen before or after cooking. If thawed by other methods, cook before refreezing.

COLD STORAGE CHART

These short, but safe, time limits will help keep refrigerated food from spoiling or becoming dangerous to eat. Because freezing keeps food safe indefinitely, recommended storage times are for quality only.

Product	Refrigerator 40 °F (4.4 °C)	Freezer 0 °F(-17.7 °C)		
EGGS				
	100			
Fresh, in shell	3 to 5 weeks	Do not freeze		
Raw yolks & whites	2 to 4 days	1 year		
Hard cooked	1 week	Does not freeze well		
LIQUID PASTEURIZED EGGS, EGG SUBSTITUTES				
opened	3 days	Does not freeze well		
unopened	10 days	1 year		
Mayonnaise Commercial, refrigerate after opening	2 months	Do not freeze		
FROZEN DINNERS & ENTREES				
Keep frozen until ready to heat	_	3 to 4 months		
DELI & VACUUM-PACKED PRODUCTS				
Store-prepared (or homemade) egg, chicken, ham, tuna, & macaroni salads	3 to 5 days	Does not freeze well		
HOT DOGS & LUNCHEON MEATS				
Hot dogs				
opened package	1 week	1 to 2 months		
unopened package	2 weeks	1 to 2 months		

Product	Refrigerator 40 °F (4.4 °C)	Freezer 0 °F(-17.7 °C)			
Lunch	Luncheon meat				
opened package	3 to 5 days	1 to 2 months			
unopened package	2 weeks	1 to 2 months			
BACON	& SAUSAGE				
Bacon	7 days	1 month			
Sausage, raw — from chicken, turkey, pork, beef	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months			
Smoked breakfast links, patties	7 days	1 to 2 months			
Hard sausage — pepperoni, jerky sticks	2 to 3 weeks	1 to 2 months			
SUMMER SAUSAGE labeled "Keep Refrigerated"					
Opened	3 weeks	1 to 2 months			
Unopened	3 months	1 to 2 months			
HAM, CORNED BEEF					
Corned beef, in pouch with pickling juices	5 to 7 days	Drained, 1 month			
Ham, canned labeled "Keep Refrigerated					
Opened	3 to 5 days	1 to 2 months			
Unopened	6 to 9 months	Do not freeze			

Product	Refrigerator 40 °F (4.4 °C)	Freezer 0 °F (-17.7 °C)		
HAM, FULLY COOKED				
Vacuum sealed at plant, undated, unopened	2 weeks	1		
vacuum sealed at plant, dated, unopened	"Use-By" date on package	1 to 2 months		
Whole Half Slices	7 days 3 to 5 days 3 to 4 days			
HAMBURGER, GROUND & STEW MEAT				
Hamburger & stew meat	1 to 2 days	3 to 4		
Ground turkey, veal, pork, lamb, & mixtures of them		months		
FRESH BEEF, VEAL, LAMB, PORK				
Steaks	3 to 5 days	6 to 12 months		
Chops	3 to 5 days	months		
Roasts	3 to 5 days	4 to 12 months		
Variety meats — tongue, liver, heart, kidneys, chitterlings	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months		
Pre-stuffed, uncooked pork chops, lamb chops, or chicken breasts stuffed with dressing	1 day	Does not freeze well		
SOUPS &	STEWS			
Vegetable or meat added Cooked meat & meat casseroles	3 to 4 days	2 to 3 months		

Product	Refrigerator 40 °F (4.4 °C)	Freezer 0 °F (-17.7 °C)		
COOKED MEAT LEFTOVERS				
Gravy & meat broth	3 to 4 days	2 to 3		
	3 to 4 days	liionens		
FRESH PO	DULTRY			
Chicken or turkey, whole	1 to 2 days	1 year		
Chicken or turkey, pieces	1 to 2 days	9 months		
Giblets	1 to 2 days	3 to 4 months		
COOKED POULTRY LEFTOVERS				
Fried chicken	3 to 4 days	4 months		
Cooked poultry casseroles	3 to 4 days	4 to 6 months		
Pieces, plain	3 to 4 days	4 months		
Pieces covered with broth, gravy	3 to 4 days	6 months		
Chicken nuggets, patties	3 to 4 days	1 to 3 months		
OTHER COOKED LEFTOVERS				
Pizza, cooked	3 to 4 days	1 to 2 months		
Stuffing, cooked	3 to 4 days	1 month		

Food Safety Questions?

Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline

If you have a question about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the USDA

Meat and Poultry Hotline

toll free at

1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)

The hotline is open year-round

Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (English or

Spanish).
Recorded food safety
messages are available
24 hours a day. Check
out the
FSIS Web site at

www.fsis.usda.gov.

Send E-mail questions to MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov.

AskKaren.gov

FSIS' automated response system can provide food safety information 24/7 and a

live chat during Hotline hours.



Mobile phone users
m.askkaren.gov
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