**Purpose:**

To provide essential guidelines for handling food safely to prevent foodborne illness. This document outlines proper practices for shopping, storing, preparing, cooking, and serving food.

**Procedures:**

**Food Safety Basics:**

1. **Clean:**
   * Wash hands and surfaces often.
2. **Separate:**
   * Don’t cross-contaminate.
3. **Cook:**
   * Cook to the right temperature.
4. **Chill:**
   * Refrigerate promptly.

**Shopping:**

1. **Purchasing:**
   * Purchase refrigerated or frozen items after selecting non-perishables.
   * Avoid meat or poultry in torn or leaking packaging.
   * Do not buy food past “Sell-By,” “Use-By,” or other expiration dates.

**Storage:**

1. **Refrigeration:**
   * Refrigerate perishable food within 2 hours, or 1 hour if above 90 °F (32.2 °C).
   * Check refrigerator temperature (40 °F or below) and freezer temperature (0 °F or below) with an appliance thermometer.
   * Cook or freeze fresh poultry, fish, ground meats within 2 days; other meats within 3 to 5 days.
   * Wrap perishable food securely to prevent contamination.
   * Wrap original packaging with foil or plastic wrap for freezing.
2. **Canned Foods:**
   * Safe indefinitely if not exposed to extreme temperatures.
   * Discard dented, rusted, or swollen cans.
   * High-acid canned food: Best quality for 12 to 18 months.
   * Low-acid canned food: Best quality for 2 to 5 years.

**Preparation:**

1. **Hygiene:**
   * Wash hands before and after handling food.
   * Prevent cross-contamination by keeping raw meats separate from other foods.
   * Wash hands, cutting boards, knives, and countertops with hot, soapy water after handling raw meats.
   * Marinate meat in a covered dish in the refrigerator.
   * Sanitize cutting boards with a solution of 1 teaspoon chlorine bleach in 1 quart of water.

**Thawing:**

1. **Methods:**
   * Refrigerator: Slow, safe thawing. Prevent juices from contaminating other foods.
   * Cold Water: Faster thawing in a leak-proof bag, change water every 30 minutes, cook immediately.
   * Microwave: Cook meat immediately after thawing.

**Cooking:**

1. **Temperature:**
   * Cook beef, pork, lamb, veal steaks, chops, roasts to at least 145 °F (62.8 °C) and let rest for 3 minutes.
   * Cook ground meat to 160 °F (71.1 °C).
   * Cook poultry to 165 °F (73.9 °C).

**Serving:**

1. **Holding Temperatures:**
   * Hot food: 140 °F (60 °C) or warmer.
   * Cold food: 40 °F (4.4 °C) or colder.
   * Use chafing dishes, slow cookers, and warming trays for hot food. Nest dishes in bowls of ice for cold food.
   * Do not leave perishable food out for more than 2 hours, or 1 hour if above 90 °F (32.2 °C).

**Leftovers:**

1. **Storage:**
   * Discard food left out for more than 2 hours, or 1 hour if above 90 °F (32.2 °C).
   * Place food in shallow containers for rapid cooling in the refrigerator or freezer.
   * Use leftovers within 4 days and reheat to 165 °F (73.9 °C).

**Refreezing:**

1. **Guidelines:**
   * Meat and poultry defrosted in the refrigerator may be refrozen before or after cooking. Cook before refreezing if thawed by other methods.

**Cold Storage Chart:**

1. **Refrigeration and Freezing Times:**
   * Follow the provided chart for safe refrigeration and freezing times for various foods to maintain quality and safety.

For more information or questions about food safety, contact the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline at 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) or visit [USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/).