

Food Safety at Home



Just follow four basic rules—Clean, Separate, Cook and Chill—and you will Fight BAC![™] (bacteria that can cause foodborne illness.) Fight BAC![™] is a national education campaign designed to teach everyone about food safety. Keep these Fight BAC![™] rules in mind. Tell your friends and family and grandchildren to join the team and get them to be “BAC-Fighters” too.



Rule 1 – Clean

Wash hands and surfaces often. Bacteria can be present throughout the kitchen, including on cutting boards, utensils, sponges and counter tops. Wash your hands with hot soapy water before and after handling food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling pets. Wash your cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops with hot soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go on to the next food. Periodically, kitchen sanitizers (including a solution of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach to 1 quart of water) can be used for added protection. Once cutting boards (including plastic, non-porous, acrylic and wooden boards) become excessively worn or develop hard-to-clean grooves, you should replace them. Consider using paper towels to clean

up kitchen surfaces. If you use cloth towels, wash them often in the hot cycle of your washing machine. Also Important: Rinse raw produce in water. Don't use soap or other detergents. If necessary—and appropriate—use a small vegetable brush to remove surface dirt.



Rule 2 – Separate

Don't cross-contaminate. Cross-contamination is the scientific word for how bacteria can be spread from one food product to another. This is especially true when handling raw meat, poultry and seafood, so keep these foods and their juices away from foods that aren't going to be cooked. Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from other foods in your grocery-shopping cart and in your refrigerator. If possible, use a different cutting board for raw meat products. Always wash hands, cutting boards, dishes and utensils with hot soapy water after they come in contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs and unwashed fresh produce. Place cooked food on a clean plate. If you put cooked food on the unwashed plate that held raw food (like meat, poultry or seafood), bacteria from the raw food could contaminate your cooked food.



Rule 3 - Cook

Cook to proper temperatures. Food safety experts agree that foods are properly cooked when they are heated for a long enough time and at a high enough temperature to kill the harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness. Use a clean food thermometer, which measures the internal temperature of cooked

foods, to make sure meat, poultry, casseroles and other foods are properly cooked all the way through. Cook roasts and steaks to at least 145°F. Whole poultry should be cooked to 180°F for doneness in the thigh. Chicken breast should be cooked to 170°F. Cook ground beef, where bacteria can spread during processing, to at least 160°F. Check the temperature with a food thermometer. Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm. Don't use recipes in which eggs remain raw or only partially cooked. Fish should be opaque and flake easily with a fork. When cooking in a microwave oven, make sure there are no cold spots in food where bacteria can survive. To do this, cover food, stir and rotate the dish by hand once or twice during cooking. (Unless you have a turntable in the microwave.) Use a food thermometer to make sure foods have reached a safe internal temperature. If you are reheating food, leftovers should be heated to 165°F. Bring sauces, soup and gravy to a boil.



Rule 4 - Chill

Did You Know? At room temperature, bacteria in food can double every 20 minutes. The more bacteria there are, the greater the chance you could become sick. So, refrigerate foods quickly because cold temperatures keep most harmful bacteria from multiplying. A lot of people think it will harm their refrigerator to put hot food inside—it's not true. It won't harm your refrigerator and it will keep your food—and you—safe. Set your home refrigerator no higher than 40°F and the freezer unit at 0°F. Check the temperature occasionally with an appliance thermometer.

- Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared food and leftovers within 2 hours.

- Divide large amounts of leftovers into shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator.
- **Safe Thawing:** Never thaw foods at room temperature. You can safely thaw food in the refrigerator. Four to five pounds takes 24 hours to thaw. You can also thaw food outside the refrigerator by immersing in cold water. Change the water every half hour to keep the water cold. You can thaw food in the microwave, but if you do, be sure to continue cooking right away.
- Marinate foods in the refrigerator.
- Don't pack the refrigerator too full. Cold air must circulate to keep food safe.



More Information

If you have questions and you'd like to talk to an expert, please call the following toll-free hotlines. You can reach the Food and Drug Administration by calling: 1-888-SAFEFOOD. The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline is 1-800-535-4555. Or use your computer to get food safety information at www.FoodSafety.gov

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