

SAFE HANDLING OF MEAT AND POULTRY PRODUCTS

Producing safe food is good for consumers—and good for business. By the time food reaches your kitchen, members of the meat and poultry industry—from animal production through processing and packaging—have taken many actions to ensure safety.

However, it is essential that food preparers act as partners in maintaining safety all the way to the table. Practicing safe handling methods in the home can reduce the risk of foodborne illness and keep your family healthy.

Remember these simple rules at every step, from the store to your table:

CLEAN: Wash hands and surfaces often.

SEPARATE: Keep raw meat and poultry products separated from other foods while shopping and during preparation.

COOK: Be sure meat products are cooked to the proper temperature using a thermometer.

CHILL: Refrigerate raw meat and poultry and cooked leftovers promptly.

From the store to home

Raw meat products must remain cold to ensure safety. The temperature zone between 40°F and 140°F is called the 'danger zone' because bacteria can multiply rapidly. Follow these guidelines when shopping:

- ✓ Make meat and poultry products the last items you select.
- ✓ Choose products that are cold, tightly wrapped and with no leaks or punctures in the packaging.
- ✓ Purchase meat and poultry products before the sell-by date expires. If purchased on or near the sell-by date, prepare or freeze the product right away. If product features a use-by date, follow it.
- ✓ Separate raw meat and poultry from other foods in the cart.
- ✓ Bring a cooler for meat and poultry products if the ride home is more than an hour.

Storage

Once home, meat and poultry products must be refrigerated or frozen promptly. Safe storage times in the refrigerator and the freezer vary depending on the product.

- ✓ Place meat or poultry products in a container in the refrigerator so any juices do not touch other foods.
- ✓ Never defrost meat or poultry at room temperature. Safe defrosting practices include thawing in the refrigerator, submerging in cold water or defrosting in the microwave.

Meal preparation

Keep surfaces and hands **CLEAN** and meat products **SEPARATE** from other foods.

- ✓ **CLEAN** hands thoroughly in hot, soapy water before and after handling raw meat.
- ✓ **CLEAN** utensils with hot, soapy water if they have touched raw meat.
- ✓ **CLEAN** counters, cutting boards and other surfaces that raw meat has touched.
- ✓ **CLEAN** cutting boards between uses with hot, soapy water or consider buying one cutting board for meat and another for fruits, vegetables and other foods.
- ✓ **CLEAN** the refrigerator inside and out once a month.
- ✓ **SEPARATE** raw meat and poultry from other ready-to-eat foods. Do not let juices or marinades that touched raw meat or poultry come in contact ready-to-eat foods or cooked meat.
- ✓ Use **SEPARATE** plates to transport raw and cooked products.

Cooking

Product	Internal temperature
Fresh Beef, Veal or Lamb	
Well done	170°F
Medium	160°F
Medium Rare	145°F
Pork	
Well done	170°F
Medium	160°F
Ham	
Fresh	160°F
Pre-cooked (reheated)	140°F
Poultry	165°F or higher according to preference

Cooking is the most critical step in ensuring safety. Meat and poultry products must be cooked to a safe internal temperature to ensure that any bacteria are thoroughly destroyed.

- ✓ Use an instant-read thermometer to determine if the meat is thoroughly cooked. Cooking time or the product's color or firmness are not reliable indicators of doneness.
- ✓ Thermometers should be inserted into the thickest part of the meat with the tip probe in the center of the product and removed in 10 to 15 seconds to get an accurate temperature reading.
- ✓ Avoid touching any bones, the grill or the pan with the thermometer as this can affect the accuracy of the reading.

Leftovers

Leftovers must be handled properly to ensure that any bacteria are not given an opportunity to multiply.

- ✓ Refrigerate or freeze leftovers promptly in shallow, covered containers or wrapped tightly.
- ✓ Store cooked meat in a 40°F or below refrigerator for three to four days or frozen in a 0°F or below freezer for three to six months.
- ✓ Reheat leftovers to 165°F or until steaming hot. If microwaving, cover and rotate to ensure even reheating.

About ready-to-eat foods

Ready-to-eat meals, purchased hot or cold, have become a staple in consumers' kitchens.

Some of these products—like hot dogs or chicken nuggets—are fully cooked and simply require reheating. These products must be kept cold (40°F or below) until they are ready to be heated to at least 165°F.

Others are purchased hot—like rotisserie chicken or barbecue ribs—and must be kept hot (above 140°F).

Be sure to avoid the danger zone between 40°F and 140°F.

Enjoy...

Following these simple steps will help ensure that you can enjoy meat and poultry with confidence.

MEAT MATTERS

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For more information, please visit www.meatsafety.org or call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline 888.674.6854

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