

RISKY BUSINESS: KEEPING FOOD SAFE

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The objective of this study topic is to help participants become more familiar with the principles of keeping food safe by using a simple "Market-to-Mealtime" Checklist.

GETTING STARTED:

Give a copy of the participant handout to each group member. Have them complete the quiz on the front of the handout. Allow approximately 10 minutes to complete the quiz. You will discuss the correct answers to the quiz after completing the discussion of "Risky Business: Keeping Food Safe."

INTRODUCTION:

America's food supply is one of the safest in the world; however, more than 30 million Americans suffer from some type of foodborne illness each year. Farmers, manufacturers, supermarkets, and restaurants follow strict rules and regulations to help ensure safe and wholesome foods for consumers. These rules and regulations end, however, when food goes into your shopping cart or car, or is delivered to your home or workplace. We will discuss steps in food handling that you can follow from grocery shopping through storing leftovers. After all, you are the best line of defense against foodborne illness. You are the final safety checkpoint in the risky business of keeping food safe.

THERE'S DANGER IN NUMBERS. Bacteria are everywhere--in air, soil, water, plants, animals--everywhere. Some are beneficial but some can make you ill. To prevent harmful bacteria from making you ill, you must prevent them from multiplying.

Most foodborne illness-causing bacteria do not grow well at refrigerator temperatures (below 40 degrees F) or above 140 degrees F. However, between 40 degrees and 140 degrees, bacteria

can multiply rapidly. That's why this temperature range is referred to as "THE DANGER ZONE." Never leave food in the danger zone for more than two hours. (Refer to "DANGER ZONE" illustration in participant handout).

New safe handling labels on raw meat and poultry products summarize the basic guidelines for keeping food safe. (Refer to "Safe Handling Instructions" label in participant handout).

SAFETY CHECKLIST. By following these simple steps, you can help protect yourself and your family from foodborne illness.

AT THE GROCERY STORE:

- Shop for meat, poultry, and seafood last; place them in plastic bags, when possible, to keep the packages from dripping on other foods in your cart.
- Buy products labeled "keep refrigerated" only if they are stored in a refrigerated case and are cold to the touch.
- Feel frozen foods to make sure they are rock solid.
- Choose canned goods that are free of dents, cracks, rust, or bulging lids; check packages for holes, tears, and open corners.
- Purchase dated packages only if the "sell by" date has not expired.
- Bring an ice chest for groceries if it will take longer than 30 minutes to get them home. Even short stops during hot weather may let your groceries warm up to unsafe temperatures.

IN THE KITCHEN:

- When You Store Food...**
- Use a refrigerator thermometer to check

that your refrigerator is cooling at 35 to 40 degrees F; your freezer should be at or below 0 degrees F.

- Space items in your refrigerator and freezer so air can circulate freely.
- Freeze fresh meat, poultry, and fish immediately if you don't plan to use them within a few days; overwrap packages with aluminum foil or heavy freezer wrap to make them airtight.
- Wrap raw meat, poultry, and fish or place them in separate plastic bags on a plate on the lowest shelf of your refrigerator to keep juices from dripping on other foods or refrigerator surfaces.
- Follow the "use by," "keep refrigerated," and "safe handling" information on package labels. If you cannot remember when you put a food in the refrigerator, throw it out.
- Use refrigerated beef steaks, roasts, deli meats, and poultry within three to four days. Ground meat, ground poultry, and fish should be used within one to two days.
- Pack perishables in iced coolers when cleaning or defrosting your refrigerator or freezer.

Before You Cook...

- Wash your hands with hot, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before starting any food preparation. If you stop to do something else, be sure to wash your hands again--especially after using the bathroom, changing a diaper, blowing your nose, or touching pets.
- Cover any cuts or sores on your hands with a bandage or use plastic gloves, if available. This protects you and the food.
- Keep everything that touches food clean. Bacteria can hitch rides around your kitchen in many ways: on dirty utensils, sponges, or dish cloths; on plates or cutting boards; and on unwashed hands.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, and fish and their juices from coming into contact with other foods during preparation--especially foods that won't be cooked. Wash your hands and all utensils and surfaces with hot, soapy water after contact with raw meat.
- Never chop fresh vegetables or salad ingredients on a cutting board that was

used for raw meat without properly cleaning it first. If possible, use a separate cutting board for the sole preparation of raw meat, poultry, and fish.

- Carefully wash cutting boards with hot, soapy water and then sanitize them with a solution of household bleach and water (check bleach label for directions).
- Regularly clean refrigerator surfaces with hot, soapy water.
- Thaw foods only in the refrigerator or microwave oven; never leave food out at room temperature. When you thaw food in a microwave, finish cooking it immediately.
- Use a covered nonmetallic container to marinate meat, poultry, and seafood. Place it in the refrigerator, not on the kitchen counter. Discard the leftover marinade that was in contact with the raw meat, or bring to a rolling boil for one minute before using on cooked meat.
- Thoroughly rinse poultry and seafood in cold water and check for any off odors before cooking.
- Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables with cold, running water--using a brush to scrub, if necessary.
- Turn your face away and cover your mouth and nose with a tissue if you sneeze or cough while preparing food; always wash hands afterwards.

COOKING THOROUGHLY:

- Cook eggs until the yolk and white are firm, not runny. Throw away or modify recipes with uncooked or partially cooked eggs.
- Do not eat raw cookie dough or taste any meat, poultry, fish, or egg dish while it is raw or partially cooked. Never drink unpasteurized milk or milk products.
- Use a meat or a "quick-read" thermometer to take the guesswork out of cooking meat and poultry. Place the thermometer at the thickest portion of the meat, not touching bone, fat, or the bottom of the pan. (Refer to chart in participant handout.)
- Roast meat or poultry in oven temperatures of 325 degrees F or above. Avoid long, low temperatures when cooking meats, which may encourage bacterial growth before cooking is

complete.

- Never partially heat foods and then refrigerate or set them aside to finish cooking later. Partially cooked foods may not reach a temperature high enough to destroy bacteria.
- Cook ground beef to 160 degrees F. Beef roasts and steaks should be well-browned on the surface, but the interior will be slightly pink when cooked to 145 degrees F (medium rare).
- When basting grilled meats, brush sauce on cooked surfaces only. Be careful not to contaminate fully cooked meats by reusing leftover marinade or adding sauce with a brush previously used on raw meats. Bring marinades to a rolling boil for one minute for safe use on cooked meats.
- Stir, rotate, and cover foods for even cooking in the microwave oven. Check temperature with a "quick-read" thermometer in at least three spots, and follow recommended standing times outside the microwave so the food completes cooking. Clean interior of microwave thoroughly after you've finished cooking.

SERVING IT SAFELY:

At Home...

- Always place cooked food in a clean dish for serving and use clean utensils. Never use the same unwashed plate that held raw meat, poultry, or fish to serve the cooked meat.
- Do not allow any cooked food to sit out at room temperature for more than two hours.
- When serving from a buffet, keep cold foods on ice at a temperature below 40 degrees F, and keep hot foods above 140 degrees F until they are eaten. Do not mix fresh food with food that has already been out for serving.

Away From Home...

- Carry a lunch in an insulated container with a freeze-pack or include a frozen

juice-box or small plastic bottle of frozen water. Keep it away from direct sun.

- Pack chilled picnic food in a cooler with a freeze-pack or ice. Do not use your cooler to chill room-temperature foods. When possible, use one cooler for beverages (opened often) and one for perishable foods (kept closed).
- Wrap raw meat, poultry, and fish, or place them in sealed storage bags or covered containers to avoid leakage onto other foods in the cooler (or use a separate cooler). Use moistened towelettes before and after handling the raw meat, or bring soap and a bottle filled with clean water to wash hands and surfaces.
- Cut into the middle of hamburgers to see if the meat is no longer pink.
- At salad bars and buffets, check for a clean, sanitary appearance of serving containers, and make sure cold foods are kept chilled and entrees are steaming hot.

HANDLING LEFTOVERS:

- Refrigerate cooked foods promptly after serving (within two hours after cooking). You don't need to cool food first, but do divide large amounts of leftovers into small portions and place them in shallow containers for quick chilling.
- Freeze leftovers that you won't eat within a few days.
- Cover and reheat leftovers to 165 degrees F throughout or until steaming hot. Stir foods while you reheat them to ensure that all the food reaches the appropriate temperature. Reheat sauces, soups, and gravies to a rolling boil for at least one minute before serving.
- Never taste leftover food that looks or smells strange to see if you can still use it. When in doubt, throw it out.
- Dispose of any potentially unsafe food in a garbage disposal or a tightly wrapped package so it cannot be eaten by people or animals.

SUMMARY OF FOOD SAFETY MISTAKES:

(Refer to the "Ten Common Food Safety Mistakes" in the participant handout.) Review the "Risky Business Quiz" on the participant handout.

IN CASE OF FOODBORNE ILLNESS:

As with any illness, judgment is needed to determine if and when to seek medical care. If symptoms are severe (vomiting, diarrhea, fever, or cramps) or the victim is very young, elderly, pregnant, or already ill, call a doctor or go to the hospital immediately. It's not always easy to tell if the problem is the result of the flu or food poisoning. Most often, people get sick within 4 to 48 hours after eating contaminated food.

You or your physician should report serious cases of foodborne illness to the local health department. If the food came from a restaurant or commercial outlet, you may be asked to keep the food refrigerated so officials can examine it later.

Credits: Adapted from: Plating It Safe, USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service/Extension Service.

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