

USA Food Safety Programs, Incorporated
P.O. Box 25425 Chicago, Illinois 60625
773-539-FOOD (3663) www.usafoodsafety.com

Food Safety for the Home

USA Food Safety is a company founded to provide food safety programs and training to both restaurant and industrial facilities.

In the foodservice industry, these businesses often spend thousands of dollars to ensure that:

- their facilities are functioning in a clean and sanitary manner,
- their employees understand the importance of proper food safety habits, and
- all their products are shipped and served to their customers without any possible health dangers.

However, the average home does not have the access to the type of professional training and consultation that professional foodservice facilities use. For that reason, USA Food Safety is happy to provide you with these food safety basics for the home.

While ***we don't claim*** that this information ***covers every topic*** regarding the subject of food safety (that would require hundreds of pages of documentation), the topics covered below will provide you with the basics that will help to increase the probability that your family and guests will enjoy your gatherings without and food related illnesses.

Contents

p.3 Shopping – Timing is Everything

p.4 Basic Kitchen Preparation

p.5 Thawing Dos and Don'ts

p. 6 Proper Hand Washing

p. 7 More Hand Safety Tips

p. 8 Preventing Cross-Contamination

p. 9 The Most Vulnerable People

p. 10 The Temperature Danger Zone

p. 11 Cooking to and Checking the Proper Temperatures

p. 12 Proper Cooking Temperatures

p. 13 Serving Tips

p. 14 After the Party

p. 15 Afterword

Shopping – Timing is Everything!

One of the primary differences between professional foodservice operations and the home is that professionals have their food delivered to their facilities, while in most cases, most households shop for their own groceries, and bring them home themselves.

Now, when you shop for groceries, whether for a major event, or for your everyday needs, *it is critical for food safety* that you plan and time your shopping trip to keep your perishables (especially meat and poultry) out of proper refrigerated temperatures for as little time as possible!

These key points will help ensure that your that your perishable food items are kept as temperature-safe as possible:

- plan your trip to the supermarket during the times when the market is least busy. This will ensure that the perishables will not warm to dangerous temperatures while you're waiting in the checkout line.

- plan your shopping trip so that your visit to the market is the **LAST** stop on your trip, and ***go home immediately***. Run your other errands (gas station, dry cleaners, etc.) first, so that your critical food items get home as soon as possible, and are not sitting in the trunk while you are running other errands. Also, if you run into a friend while at the market, make sure you don't waste time talking, but politely say that you have perishables that must be refrigerated immediately. (Note: this doesn't mean that you have to drive like you're in a movie chase scene, but do get home as quickly as possible).

- in the market, make it a point to buy your perishables **LAST!** This will ensure that your perishables will not warm up to dangerous levels while you're going up and down the aisles purchasing other items.

- of course, once you're home, put your perishables in the refrigerator or freezer **IMMEDIATELY!**

Basic Kitchen Preparation

- The first thing you should do to ensure a safe kitchen is invest in a refrigerator thermometer. You can pick one up at any supermarket for around \$5-6. Make sure your refrigerator is set at *or below 41°F*.
- If you are hosting a major gathering (holiday dinner in the winter, cookout during the summer), your fridge should be set even lower, for the following reason: with the extra activity involved with a major event, your refrigerator will be opened and closed much more often, with cold air exiting and warm air entering. Setting your fridge lower will provide you with a “safety zone” that will keep the perishables inside at a safe temperature.
- Another thing to plan differently for major gatherings: Put all drinks (soda, beer, wine, etc.) in a separate cooler instead of the refrigerator. This will reduce the number of times that the door will be opened and closed, and keep the food in a safe temperature zone.
- Keep your refrigerator as uncluttered as possible. Refrigerators cool food by constantly circulating cold air. The more items you have in there, the less effective your refrigerator will work for you. If you’re hosting a major event, you should clean out any and all old and forgotten items to ensure optimum air flow.
- Have an all-purpose dishrag for overall wiping in the kitchen? **THROW IT OUT!** Dishrags are havens for bacteria. All they do is spread around what they picked up previously. At USA Food Safety, we recommend you stock up on paper towels, and dispose of them after one use. That’s what the pros do. The only time you will see a reusable cloth in a top-notch restaurant is in a facility that can afford professional sanitizing equipment that is out of the price range of the family home. Do all your wiping and cleaning with paper towels. Only use one time, and throw out immediately. When you throw out the towel, you’re also throwing out the bacteria you wiped up.
- Make sure various food types (meat, poultry, vegetables, etc) are wrapped and/or covered, and kept separate from each other. In addition, it is **CRITICAL** that raw foods to be cooked be kept on the **BOTTOM** of the fridge, and ready-to-eat foods (salads, etc.) be kept **ABOVE** them. In industrial terms, this is called preventing “cross-contamination.” The reason this procedure is so important is that juices and drippings from the raw food contains bacteria (that is killed when cooked to the proper temperatures). If these drippings come in contact with food that will not be cooked (like a salad) serious food poisoning can occur.

Thawing Dos and Don'ts

***NEVER THAW FROZEN
FOOD AT ROOM
TEMPERATURE!***

Get the message? Good.

When food is thawed at room temperature, microorganisms in the food grow the most rapidly.

For the home, we recommend only two thawing methods as safe:

- Thaw in the refrigerator, making sure that the fridge is set at 41°F or lower.
- Thaw under cold (70°F or colder) running water, with the food in a pot large enough to hold the item, and with strong enough water flow to wash away any loose food particles.

Oh, and just in case you've forgotten...

***NEVER THAW FROZEN
FOOD AT ROOM
TEMPERATURE!***

Proper Hand Washing

While there are many important topics on the subject of food safety, one is always at the top of every professional's checklist: Hand Washing.

At USA Food Safety, we advise our clients to "Think Like a Doctor" when hand washing. You've all seen in movies or on TV where the doctor thoroughly washes his hands before surgery. When washing hands before handling food, "Think Like a Doctor."

In the home, hand washing awareness is even more critical, due to the fact that there are many more distractions around the house, and more "outsiders" coming in and out of the kitchen.

Here are the critical hand washing basics everybody needs to know (adapted for home use):

When and How to Wash Your Hands

You Should Wash Your Hands:

- Before you begin a food handling task
- After you use the restroom
- Before and after you handle raw meat, poultry, and seafood
- After you touch your hair, face or body
- After you sneeze, cough, or use a tissue
- After you smoke, eat, drink or chew gum or tobacco
- After you touch a family pet
- After you take out the garbage
- After you clear tables or pick up dirty dishes
- After you touch your clothes or apron
- After you touch anything that may contaminate your hands

This whole process should take approximately *twenty (20) seconds*

- 1) Wet your hands with running water as hot as you can comfortably stand (at least 100 degrees F)
- 2) Apply soap
- 3) Vigorously scrub hands and arms for at least ten to fifteen seconds. Clean under fingernails and between fingers.
- 4) Rinse thoroughly under running water.
- 5) Dry hands and arms with a single-use paper towel or warm-air hand dryer. Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet. When in a restroom, use a paper towel to open the door.

More Hand Safety

In addition to hand washing, food safety professionals also advise their clients about some other important steps to prevent food borne illnesses.

- when preparing food, do not wear nail polish. It can flake off and fall into the food. The same goes for artificial fingernails. Not in the kitchen.

- keep real fingernails short and clean.

- do not wear rings, watches, or any type of jewelry while preparing food. The area between the jewelry and your skin is a perfect breeding ground for bacteria. This is due to the temperature of your skin and the moisture (sweat) that is created when the skin is tightly covered.

- any cuts or scrapes should be covered and bandaged. In addition, bandaged hands should be covered with food handling gloves.

Speaking of gloves, they are an excellent idea for the home (and usually required in professional facilities). However, there are some important items you should know before using them in the home:

- Gloves are not a substitute for hand washing! They are an additional safety measure, not a replacement.

- Gloves must only be used once, and then disposed of.

- You must wash your hands every time you put on a new pair of gloves.

- You should change gloves:

1) As soon as they become soiled or torn,

2) Before beginning a different task, especially when working with a different type of food,

3) At least every four (4) hours during continual use, and more often when necessary, and

4) After handling raw meat and before handling cooked or ready-to-eat food.

Preventing Cross-Contamination

A major cause of food poisoning is “*Cross-Contamination.*”

Cross-Contamination is defined as the transfer of microorganisms from one food or surface to another. Microorganisms move around easily in a kitchen.

They can be transferred from food or unwashed hands to preparation areas, equipment, utensils, cutting boards, or other foods.

In the home, it is important for you to create barriers between food products.

- Use specific equipment for only one type of food item. For example, cutting boards. USA Food Safety recently purchased a set of four (4) cutting boards in a major Chicagoland supermarket for around \$6.00. These boards came in four different colors for four different types of food: Red for meat, Yellow for poultry, Green for vegetables, and White for fish. This convenient option will ensure that microorganisms from one food cannot contaminate another type of food for a very economical price.

- Clean and sanitize all work surfaces, equipment, and utensils after each food group task. It is not enough to simply rinse and wipe tools and surfaces after preparing a certain food type. You **MUST** not only clean, but also **SANITIZE** each surface on every piece of equipment before preparing a different type of food. While restaurants use sanitizing chemicals, the home user will probably use either a dishwasher or hot water sinks. See the instructions on p. 14 for proper hot water sanitizing tips.

- While restaurants have plenty of room (by design) to prepare the various items on the menu, the home kitchen usually works with a much more limited space. For this reason, you should plan ahead to prepare specific items one at a time. Here’s an example of an effective schedule:

- 1) Clean and Sanitize
- 2) Prepare Salads
- 3) Clean and Sanitize
- 4) Prepare Fish
- 5) Clean and Sanitize
- 6) Prepare Meat
- 7) Clean and Sanitize
- 8) Prepare Chicken
- 9) Clean and Sanitize

The Most Vulnerable People

While anyone can get sick from unsafe food, there are certain people who, for various reasons, are most vulnerable to food poisoning.

People in these categories have weakened immune systems that could cause serious health problems, as opposed to an average person who might just get a stomach ache.

If any of the following are in or visiting your house, you should be extra careful in all your food preparation procedures.

1) The Very Young

2) The Very Old

3) Pregnant Women

4) People on Certain Medications

5) People Who Have Recently Had Major Surgery

6) Organ-Transplant Recipients

7) People Who Have Pre-Existing or Chronic Illnesses (including STDs).

Since you often can't tell if a guest in your house falls into one of these categories (who comes out and says that they have an STD? Nobody), you should always prepare your food with the possibility that you may have a high-risk guest.

The Temperature Danger Zone

The Temperature Danger Zone is the range where microorganisms in food grow most rapidly, and to levels where there is the most risk of food poisoning.

At USA Food Safety, we define the Temperature Danger Zone as:

Below 140°F

**The Temperature
Danger Zone!**

Above 40°F

Now, the 140°F temperature is not an indication of proper cooking temperature. Proper cooking temperatures for various foods are listed below.

Cooking to and Checking the Proper Temperatures

In order to make sure that your food is cooked to the proper safe temperature, your first step should be the purchase of a good food thermometer.

You can buy a fine food thermometer at any major supermarket. They come in two basic styles:

- an analog (dial) thermometer, which costs around \$12.00, and
- a digital thermometer, which costs around \$17.00.

To check the proper temperature of cooked food, the procedure is the same for both:

- first off, wash, rinse, sanitize, and air-dry the thermometer before and after each use. For sanitizing, you can buy alcohol wipes (with 70% isopropyl alcohol) and any major drugstore for this purpose.
- measure the temperature of the cooked food by inserting the probe of the thermometer into the THICKEST part of the food. Wait at least fifteen (15) seconds and check the temperature.
- of course, remember to wash, rinse, sanitize, and air-dry the thermometer after each use.
- NEVER put an unclean thermometer back into its sleeve. All you'll be doing is putting bacteria into the sleeve.
- NEVER use any other type of thermometer (especially a glass one) for this purpose. Only use the proper type of food thermometer.

Proper Cooking Temperatures

Below are the USA Food Safety recommended minimum temperatures for various foods.

You may see different temperatures on other charts. The reason for this is that USA Food Safety encourages its clients to do more than the minimum to allow for a “safety zone” for extra food safety.

The USA Food Safety minimum temperatures for the following are:

170°F

- Poultry
- Stuffing
- Previously Cooked and/or all Reheated Food (such as adding cooked hamburger to make chili)
- Any Food Cooked in a Microwave

160°F

- Ground Meat
- Injected Meat, such as Brined Ham and Flavor-Injected Roasts
- Ground, Chopped, or Minced Fish
- Eggs that will not be served immediately (such as a buffet)

150°F

- Steaks and Chops
- Roasts
- Fish (whole, such as filets)
- Eggs

140°F

- Fruit and Vegetables (should be served immediately)

When planning your cooking schedule, keep in mind to prepare and serve only the amount of food that will be eaten immediately, so the extra food will not cool into the Temperature Danger Zone.

Serving Tips

Now that (hopefully) you have cooked and prepared the food for your guests safely, here are a few tips to make sure that the next step, serving, is handled properly.

- a major key to food safety is minimizing bare-hand contact with food. For that reason, utensils must be provided for your guests to handle all food.

- if you are serving various items on large plates, be sure to include long-handled serving utensils (preferably disposable plastic) to keep hands away from the food on the plates.

- make sure you have enough serving utensils for each food item, and each serving plate, to prevent cross-contamination that can occur (for example: when someone uses a utensil from a meat tray to make a salad).

- only serve food (whether hot or cold) in quantities that will be consumed immediately, as to prevent food from cooling/warming into the Temperature Danger Zone.

- remember to provide tongs for ice, whether kept in the freezer or served in an ice bucket.

-when giving someone a utensil (knife, fork, spoon), handle it only by the handle (not the food contact part) and present it to him by extending the handle for him to hold.

- when serving dips, remind your guests of the “One Dip per Chip” rule. This is an important food safety tip. When a person bites a chip and redips, the bacteria in the saliva on the chip will grow in the dip and increase the possibility of food borne illness. It’s the same as spitting in someone else’s food, and none of your friends would intentionally do that. Would they? Remember, “One Dip per Chip.”

After the Party

When the party's over, there are still some food safety topics that you need to keep in mind.

- **DO NOT PUT HOT FOOD IN THE REFRIGERATOR OR FREEZER!** These appliances are not meant to cool food. They're designed to keep cold food cold. If you put hot food in the fridge, you are warming the air that is circulating throughout the interior, dangerously warming everything inside. If you have any leftovers, they should not go back into the fridge until the food temperature is 70°F or below. This is another example of where a good food thermometer is a must in every safety-conscious kitchen.

- make sure all leftover food is properly wrapped and/or covered before storage. This is an important step in the prevention of cross-contamination. Yes, food can be cross-contaminated even when stored.

- If you don't have a dishwasher, and have to wash dishes, pots pans and utensils in a sink, use the following procedures:

Note: if you have many items to be washed, you may have to repeat this procedure more than once, refilling the sink and using fresh detergent when the suds disappear and the water gets dirty. This will ensure clean and sanitary items for your next use.

1) Wash items in the first sink with detergent and water heated to at least 110°F. Use a brush or pad to loosen any stubborn food particles.

2) Immerse washed items in water heated to at least 171°F (be sure to use proper dishwashing gloves) for at least 30 seconds.

3) Spray to loosen any remaining food particles, and check the surface to make sure all food particles have been removed.

4) Never towel dry. Always air dry.

- dispose of all garbage immediately in leak proof plastic garbage bags. Pests (both insects and rodents) are attracted to the smell of food. The less food garbage you have in your house, the better. Make sure your outside garbage cans are always covered. Also, make sure to regularly wash both your inside and outside garbage cans to get rid of food odors, which attract pests.

Afterword

As stated on Page 1, this guide is not meant to cover every single topic of food safety. As any foodservice professional can tell you, food safety is a very complex and comprehensive subject.

It would take hundreds, if not thousands, of pages to cover EVERY topic and situation that may arise. What USA Food Safety is providing in this document is an overview of the key BASICS of food safety that the average household should be aware of, to prevent the most common causes of food borne illness.

This document is provided simply for informational purposes only, and cannot be used for any litigious purposes, nor does USA Food Safety accept any liability or responsibility for any legal action arising out of any event where this information was used, as no representative of USA Food Safety was present at the event where this information was used.