Food Safety

Every year, millions of people may experience one or more episodes of food borne illness, without ever knowing that it was food that caused their illness.   Generally, these illnesses are preventable if safe food handling practices are followed. Below are some facts and tips to teach you the basics of food safety. Make sure that you and your family aren't victims of preventable food borne illness!

Help Prevent Bacteria

- **CLEAN**: Wash hands and surfaces often with soap and hot water followed by sanitizing.
- **CHILL**: Refrigerate food promptly. Food should not be left at room temperature for more than two hours. Keep cold food cold--colder than 40º F.
- **COOK**: Cook foods to proper temperatures. Keep hot foods hot--hotter than 140º F . Well done is in and rare is out when ordering or cooking meat (especially ground beef). Invest in a metal stem food thermometer.
- **SEPARATE**: Don't cross-contaminate. Use a clean cutting board--preferably one cutting board for raw meat and a different cutting board for vegetables or fruits.
- **THAW & STORE**: Frozen foods should not be thawed at room temperature. Thaw potentially hazardous food in the refrigerator, in the microwave, or under cool running water. When storing leftovers, place food in small, shallow containers in the refrigerator as soon as possible to allow for a faster cooling process.

Keep hot foods hot!

If a food is cooked and put out to serve, make sure that you keep the food hot if it is not going to be eaten right away. If you are going to cool the food in the refrigerator, be sure to cool it quickly in a shallow container. Perishable food should never be kept at temperatures between 40°F and 140°F for more than 2 hours. Bacteria can grow well at these temperatures and may grow to levels that could cause illness.

Keep cold foods cold!

Cold salads, lunchmeats, dairy products and other foods, which require refrigeration, should always be kept cold (below 40°F). If they are allowed to warm up, bacteria may be able to grow to dangerous levels.

Always wash your hands well with soap and warm water, both before and after handling food!

Our hands naturally carry bacteria on them. If we transfer those bacteria to food, the food is a good place for those bacteria to grow! On the other hand, foods contain a certain amount of bacteria on them as well, especially raw foods. It is important not to let the bacteria from raw foods stay on your hands where you may transfer them to your mouth or other foods.

Don't cross contaminate!

You cook meat and poultry thoroughly to kill the harmful bacteria that may be on them. That is why it is very important to make sure that you don't allow the juices associated with raw meat and poultry to contaminate other areas of your kitchen. If you do, you may then allow those bacteria to get onto foods that don't get cooked before you eat them.

Thaw foods safely!

Frozen raw meat and poultry should never be thawed by leaving them on the counter at room temperature. The proper way to thaw such products is to either thaw them in the refrigerator or thaw them in a microwave oven.

Wash fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly!

Because fresh fruits and vegetable are grown outside, they may come in contact with a wide range of bacteria. Most of these bacteria are harmless, but it is important to realize that fresh fruits and vegetables should be washed thoroughly under running water before you consume

them.

Keep eggs refrigerated and never eat raw eggs!

Eggs may contain the bacteria Salmonella in their yolks, and so it is very important never to eave eggs at room temperature, or you will allow the Salmonella to multiply and grow. Because there may be Salmonella in eggs, you should also always make sure that you cook your eggs thoroughly before eating them. This means no runny yellow yolks, and it also means not eating any cookie or cake batters made with raw eggs!

Cook ground beef thoroughly!

E. coli O157:H7 is a pathogenic bacteria that may be present in raw ground meat. Because of this it is important that hamburgers and other ground meat products be cooked thoroughly to kill this bacteria. Ground beef must reach an internal temperature of 160°F in order to ensure that the bacteria E. coli O157:H7 has been killed. The interior of the meat may turn brown before this temperature is reached, making it look like the hamburger is done, but you cannot assure it's safety until the temperature reaches 160°F.

When in doubt, Throw it out!

Never taste food, which you think may be spoiled. If you are uncertain as to whether or not a food is still safe to eat, do not eat it. Even reheating foods cannot destroy the toxins of some bacteria if a food has been handled incorrectly. Never eat canned food if the can is bulging or looks like it has had a leak. The consequences of food borne illness are not worth the money you will save trying to salvage the food!

Safe School Lunches

Whether it's off to school or work we go, millions of Americans carry lunches from home. Food brought from home can be kept safe if it is handled and cooked safely. Perishable food must be kept cold while commuting via bus, bicycle, on foot or in a car.

After arriving at school or work, perishable food must be kept cold until lunchtime. Why keep food cold? Harmful bacteria multiply rapidly in the "danger zone" - the temperatures between 40 and 140°F. So, perishable food transported without an ice source won't stay safe long. Here are safe handling recommendations to prevent food borne illness from lunches.

Begin with Safe Food

Prepackaged combos that contain luncheon meats along with crackers, cheese, and condiments must also be kept refrigerated. This includes luncheon meats and smoked ham, which are cured or contain preservatives.

Keep Everything Clean

Wash your hands before you prepare or eat food. Keep family pets away from kitchen counters.

Don't Cross-Contaminate

At lunchtime, discard all used food packaging and paper bags. Do not reuse packaging because it could contaminate other food and cause food borne illness.

Packing Lunches

Pack just the amount of perishable food that can be eaten at lunch. That way, there won't be a problem about the storage or safety of leftovers.

It's fine to prepare the food the night before and store the packed lunch in the refrigerator. Freezing sandwiches helps them stay cold. However, for best quality, don't freeze sandwiches containing mayonnaise, lettuce, or tomatoes. Add these later.

Insulated, soft-sided lunch boxes or bags are best for keeping food cold, but metal or plastic lunch boxes and paper bags can also be used. If using paper lunch bags, create layers by double bagging to help insulate the food. An ice source should be packed with perishable food in any type of lunch bag or box.

Keeping Cold Lunches Cold

Prepare cooked food, such as turkey, ham, chicken, and vegetable or pasta salads, ahead of time to allow for thorough chilling in the refrigerator. Divide large amounts of food into shallow containers for fast chilling and easier use. Keep cooked food refrigerated until time to leave home.

To keep lunches cold away from home, include a small frozen gel pack or frozen juice box. Of course, if there's a refrigerator available, store perishable items there upon arrival.

Some food is safe without a cold source. Items that don't require refrigeration include fruits, vegetables, hard cheese, canned meat and fish, chips, breads, crackers, peanut butter, jelly, mustard, and pickles.

Keeping Hot Lunches Hot

Use an insulated container to keep food like soup, chili, and stew hot. Fill the container with boiling water, let stand for a few minutes, empty, and then put in the piping hot food. Keep the insulated container closed until lunchtime to keep the food hot—140°F or above.

Microwave Cooking/Reheating

When using the microwave oven to reheat lunches, cover food to hold in moisture and promote safe, even heating. Food should be steaming hot.