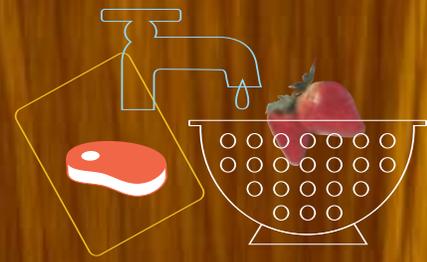# Play It Safe with Food

No one wants to get sick from eating food that's been improperly handled or prepared. Understanding how to safely prepare, handle, and store food will protect you and your family from the risk of illness caused by eating food that has been contaminated by bacteria or other microorganisms—otherwise known as microbial foodborne illness.

Every year, an estimated 76 million people in the U.S. become ill from harmful bacteria in food. Perhaps foodborne illness has affected you and you did not recognize the common symptoms, which may include an upset stomach, diarrhea, a fever, vomiting, abdominal cramps, and dehydration. It can also result in more severe illness, such as paralysis and meningitis, or even death.

Older adults are at higher risk, as are people with weakened immune systems. Individuals with certain chronic illnesses need to pay extra attention and carefully follow food safety advice.

There are simple steps that you and your family can take to avoid the risk of foodborne illness. Four words can help you remember them: Clean, Separate, Cook, and Chill. Use the temperature chart on the next page to help you keep food safe when you store it, thaw it, prepare it, cook it, serve it, and save leftovers.

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:
Clean:

Wash your hands thoroughly. When preparing, handling, and eating food, it is essential to wash hands often, particularly before and after preparing food and especially after handling raw meat, poultry, eggs, or seafood. Here's a way to effectively wash your hands:
- Wet your hands.
- Apply soap.
- Rub hands together vigorously for 20 seconds.
- Rinse them thoroughly under clean, running warm water.
- Dry them completely using a clean, disposable cloth or towel.

Keep food contact surfaces clean. Clean kitchen counters and cutting boards where you prepare food after each use, and clean your refrigerator and freezer shelves regularly with soap and hot water. Regular cleaning protects these surfaces from contaminating food.

Wash fruits and vegetables. It is important to remove and discard outer leaves and wash fresh produce prior to cooking or eating. Rinse fruits and vegetables under clean, running water, scrub with a clean brush or hands, and dry using a clean, disposable cloth or towel. Drying is an important step, as excess moisture can help bacteria grow.

Meat and poultry should not be washed or rinsed. This creates the danger of cross-contamination, which means spreading bacteria to other food, utensils, or surfaces. Plus, it's not necessary because any bacteria present on the food will be destroyed by cooking to safe internal temperatures.

Separate:

Separate raw, cooked, and ready-to-eat foods. When you're shopping, preparing, and storing food, don't cross-contaminate. Take advantage of the different sections and shelves of the refrigerator to keep raw, cooked, and ready-to-eat foods away from each other. Store raw meat, poultry, and seafood on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator or on a plate or tray, so their juices don't drip onto other foods. Always discard foods that will not be cooked if they have touched raw meat, poultry, seafood, or eggs.

Cook:

Cook meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftover foods to safe internal temperatures. This is important because it kills microorganisms. The best way to tell if a food such as meat, poultry, or leftover food has been cooked to the proper temperature is to use a food thermometer—there are several types available in most grocery stores.

Do not eat raw (unpasteurized) milk or any products made from unpasteurized milk, raw or partially cooked eggs or foods containing raw
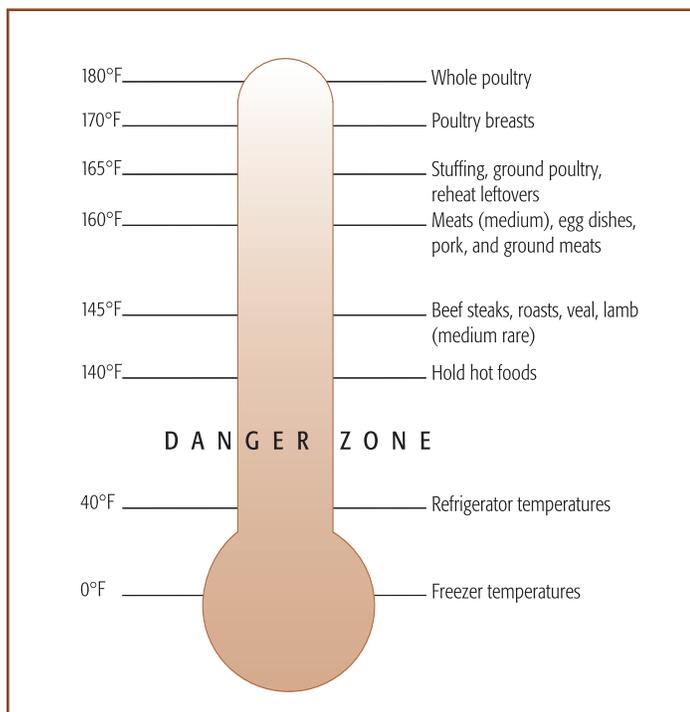
eggs, raw or undercooked meat and poultry, unpasteurized juices, or raw sprouts because they may contain harmful bacteria. Older adults should be particularly careful to only eat certain deli meats and frankfurters that have been reheated to steaming hot.

Chill:

Chill perishable foods promptly and thaw foods properly. Did you know that bacteria grow most rapidly at the unsafe temperatures between 40°F and 140°F? To keep food out of this "danger zone," keep cold food 40°F or below, and hot food 140°F or above. Plan ahead to thaw foods. Never thaw food on the kitchen counter at room temperature. Instead, thaw by placing the food in the refrigerator, submerging air-tight packaged food in cold tap water and changing the water every 30 minutes so the food continues to thaw, or defrosting food on a plate in the microwave.

Handle leftovers safely. Refrigerate or chill leftover food within 2 hours. Reheat leftover food to the proper internal temperature before serving. Discard leftover food after 3 to 4 days in the refrigerator, even if it does not look or smell bad. "If in doubt, throw it out."

Make sure your refrigerator is set at 40°F or below, and the freezer is set at 0°F or below. You can check this with an appliance thermometer, sold at most grocery stores and kitchen specialty stores.

For more important information, visit www.fightbac.org.

If you think you or others became ill from eating the same food, please report this outbreak to your local (city, tribal, or county) health department. By investigating outbreaks, public health officials learn about problems in food production that lead to illness. Applying what is learned in the investigation of one outbreak can help to prevent many future illnesses.

Temperature	Food
180°F	Whole poultry
170°F	Poultry breasts
165°F	Stuffing, ground poultry, reheat leftovers
160°F	Meats (medium), egg dishes, pork, and ground meats
145°F	Beef steaks, roasts, veal, lamb (medium rare)
140°F	Hold hot foods
	DANGER ZONE
40°F	Refrigerator temperatures
0°F	Freezer temperatures