

## Personal Hygiene: It's In Your Hands

Always wash your hands before handling food and utensils. Hands can move germs from pets, restrooms, garbage, diapers, and runny noses onto food you eat. Use soap and scrub thoroughly, especially under fingernails, and rinse with warm water. Dry hands with clean paper towels.

Raw meats often carry germs, which can make you sick. Wash your hands immediately after handling raw meats and before you touch other foods, door handles, or equipment. Also, wash hands after touching your mouth, after smoking, coughing, or eating in the kitchen.

If you are sick or have any type of infection, do not prepare any food. Give yourself a break and let someone else cook. Another option is to buy meals prepared at a restaurant or grocery store.

Disposable gloves may offer additional protection, especially if you have cuts or wounds on your hands. Gloves need to be changed immediately after handling raw meats.



## Food Temperatures: Avoid the Danger Zone

Perishable foods can be stored safely for up to a week (or to the labeled expiration date) in your refrigerator at or below 41°F.

Hot foods may be kept safely at 140°F or above. Temperatures between 41°F to 140°F are good for growing germs, which is known as the Danger Zone. Perishable foods in the Danger Zone more than four hours may produce enough germs to make people ill. If food has been left out over four hours or your refrigerator breaks down for more than four hours, throw away the food. It is not worth the risk of experiencing foodborne illness.

Use a five-inch long metal stem thermometer to check food temperatures. A thermometer with a temperature range from 0°F to 220°F is recommended and can be purchased at the local supermarket or department store.

You can then check hot and cold food temperatures using the same thermometer. Always wash off the thermometer's metal stem before using it. The metal stem will not shatter and ruin your food like a glass thermometer will.

You can ensure the thermometer is accurate by calibrating it in a glass of ice water. After a few minutes, the thermometer should



show a temperature around 32°F. If it needs to be adjusted, use a small wrench to turn the hexagonal nut under the glass until the thermometer reaches 32°F when left sitting in the ice water.

Leftovers or foods prepared a day ahead of serving require proper cooling to limit the growth of germs. The cooling process must drop food below 41°F within four hours to avoid major germ growth. When cooling warm foods, do not leave out at room temperature. After food temperature drops below 140°F, place food in an uncovered shallow pan for rapid cooling and store in refrigerator immediately. Set pan where it will not be exposed to contamination from other items such as raw meat juices.

For large containers of hot food, rapid cooling will be more difficult. Food near the edge of the container will cool much faster than the food in the middle. Cooling can be done faster if food is divided into smaller containers and stored separately in the refrigerator. Do not stack many foods together as this prevents cooling in the middle of the stack. Do not cover foods until the product has cooled to 41°F.

Another method of cooling large containers of warm food is to use an ice water bath. Set container of food in a clean sink or tub of cold water with ice cubes. Be sure the ice water level on the outside of the container is at least as high as the food level inside the container. Also, be careful not to splash any dirty water into the food.



According to the proper temperature guide below lists internal temperatures to be met or exceeded throughout the food. Test the food with your metal stem thermometer. For large containers or roasts, check temperatures in several spots. Uneven heating may result in food cooking unevenly.

## Minimum Cooking Temperatures

Poultry (chicken, turkey, etc.), stuffed meats, stuffing containing meat **165°F**

Ground beef (hamburger), ground fish (fish cakes) **155°F**

Pork and pork products **145°F**

Eggs, fish, and other foods **145°F**

Follow label directions for cooking commercially prepared foods. Reheat all leftovers thoroughly to **165°F or above**.

Microwave cooking directions: Rotate or stir midway through cooking. Heat to at least **165°F** in all parts. Let stand covered for an additional two minutes.

If in doubt, cook all foods thoroughly to **165°F**.

## Separate Foods: Don't Cross Contaminate

People may become sick when their food is exposed to germs or toxic chemicals in your home. Prevent contamination by storing dry foods in metal or glass containers with tight-fitting lids to keep insects and rodents out. Be sure cleaning supplies and pesticides are labeled properly and stored away from or below food items. Do not store foods under water or sewage pipes that may leak or drip. Keep foods stored off the floor to avoid contamination from mop water, sewage back-ups, or spills.



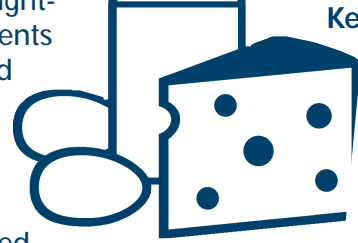
Raw meats may look fine but should always be treated as if contaminated with germs. Cooking to the proper temperature will kill the germs. Until the meat is cooked, store in your refrigerator away from and below other foods. Keep raw meat juices from dripping onto foods that will not be cooked before eating, like lettuce or cold cuts. Raw meats that are wrapped may still leak so store them away from and below other foods.



Cutting boards should be scrubbed with detergent and rinsed with hot water after each use and especially after preparing raw meats. Sanitize cutting boards after washing with a mild bleach water solution using a teaspoon of bleach per gallon of water. After sanitizing, let the cutting boards air dry allowing time for the chlorine in the bleach water to kill any germs.

## FOOD SAFETY HINTS

**Simplify recipes.** The more heating and cooling steps in a recipe, the more chance germs have to grow. Eliminate unnecessary steps and combine processes if possible.



**Keep preparation time short.** Try to prepare meals less than a day in advance. Otherwise risky foods will need to be cooled for overnight storage, then reheated the next day. Either procedure, if not correctly done, will allow germs to grow.

**Big meals need big kitchens.** If you plan to prepare a large quantity of food, consider using a licensed commercial kitchen. These facilities usually have larger preparation and storage areas. Their equipment is designed to heat and cool foods rapidly. [Home-style refrigerators can keep foods cold enough but are usually not designed to cool down large amounts of food quickly. They lack large fans to blow cold air around food items for rapid cooling.]

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Remember, it is easier and much less stressful to take preventive steps for food safety than to have friends, family, or you suffer from food-borne illness.



# Preparing Safe Meals

## A guide for your home kitchen

Protect friends, family, and yourself from illness caused by foods prepared in your kitchen. This guide will describe some simple tips for preparing safe food.



**Health Department**

For more information, visit the Multnomah County Health Department's food safety website at [www.mchealthinspect.org](http://www.mchealthinspect.org) or call the Environmental Health Section at 503-988-3400