

Family Living Focus

by

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Four Simple Steps
To Food Safety

This year's National Food Safety theme is Four Simple

- Wash hands and surfaces often
 - Avoid cross contamination
 - Cook to proper temperatures
 - Refrigerate promptly
- Make the meals and snacks from your kitchen as safe as possible. Bacteria (BAC) on surfaces or on food that could cause food-borne illness.

Even though you can't see, smell or taste BAC, bacteria may contaminate wholesome food. At risk are young children whose immune system has not fully developed, frail elderly with deteriorated immune systems, pregnant mothers, or person with other illnesses that weaken their immunity. You can fight BAC with four simple steps.

Clean: Wash hands and surfaces often. Practice washing

your hands thoroughly. Start with warm water, as hot as is comfortable. Apply the soap and scrub your hands together to make bubbles and loosen the dirt. Pay attention to the cuticles around the nail, creases and calluses. Work the lather on your hands for at least 20 seconds before rinsing hands thoroughly under running water. Dry hands with a single use paper towel or hot air dryer.

Bacteria gets on cutting boards, utensils, sponges and counter tops in the kitchen. Always wash surfaces with hot soapy water after preparing each food item and before you move on to the next food. Place plastic or non-porous cutting boards through the dishwasher. Kitchen surfaces are best cleaned with a paper towel or cloth towels that are washed in the hot cycle of your washing machine.

Separate: Don't cross contaminate. Bacteria can spread from one food to another when handling raw meat, poultry and seafood. It's important to keep these foods and their juices separate and away from ready-to-eat foods. Consider separating raw meat, poultry and seafood from other groceries in your shopping cart and in your refrigerator. Use a separate cutting board for raw meat products and thoroughly wash everything in contact with raw meat. Never place cooked meat on a plate that has held raw meat, poultry or seafood.

Cook to proper temperatures. Cook foods long enough to reach an internal temperature to kill harmful bacteria in meat, poultry, casseroles and other foods. Roasts and steaks should reach 145F and poultry should be cooked to 180F. Ground beef may harbor bacteria from processing

so it must reach 160F; color is not a safe indicator.

Eggs should be cooked until the yoke and whites are firm. Do not use recipes that leave eggs raw or only partially cooked. Fish is safe to eat when it is cooked to be opaque and flakes easily with a fork.

Microwave cooking may leave cold spots in the food where bacteria could survive. For best results always: cover the food; stir or rotate it in the oven for even distribution of cooking rays and allow the food to rest 2 minutes to complete the cooking cycle. Bring sauces, soups and gravy to a boil when reheating. Heat leftovers thoroughly to at least 165F.

Chill: Refrigerate promptly. Cool foods quickly to keep bacteria from growing and multiplying.

Refrigerator temperature should be at 40F and the freezer at 0F. Check these temperatures occasionally with an appliance thermometer.

Follow these steps to Fight BAC:

- Refrigerate or freeze foods within two hours.
- Thaw foods in the refrigerator, under cool running water or in the microwave oven only if you will complete the cooking cycle immediately. Marinade foods in the refrigerator.
- Divide large amounts of hot food into shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator.
- Cool air must circulate around the food to keep food safe, don't pack the refrigerator.

For more information about safe food handling and preparation contact your local cooperative extension office. Volunteer groups are encouraged to schedule a comprehensive training using Penn State's new curriculum, *Cooking for Crowds*.

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