

# factsheet

## Food Safety and the Shopping Cart

Food-borne illness or food poisoning is caused by eating contaminated food. Food may be safe when you purchase it, but may become contaminated if improperly handled. Food safety begins at the supermarket. Following these guidelines for shopping can help you reduce the risk of a food-borne illness.



### ✓ Shopping List

- Plan your list so that non-perishable items such as pre-packaged foods and paper products go into your cart first.
- Meat, fish, poultry and hot deli items should be picked up last, just before going through the check out.
- Buy only intact packages or cans. Never buy cans that are bulging or dented; or packages that are damaged or torn.
- Avoid ready-to-eat foods such as cooked shrimp or deli meats that are displayed directly next to raw meats or fish.
- Check **best before** and **sell by** dates. Pick the foods which will stay fresh the longest.
- Purchase foods marked "keep refrigerated" only if they are displayed under refrigeration.

### ✓ Fish, Meat and Poultry

- Always keep fresh meat and poultry separate from other items in your grocery cart. This will avoid cross contaminating — the contamination of ready-to-eat foods by the juices from raw foods.
- Packages that are loosely wrapped, torn or dripping with juices should not be purchased.
- Have fresh meat and poultry placed in separate plastic bags at the check out. Never place these items in bags with other foods. Watch for this at the checkout.
- Don't let your children handle packages of raw meat or poultry.
- Meat, fish and poultry should be placed in your home refrigerator or freezer within two hours of purchasing (within one hour in hot weather).

These should be the last items you pick up before going to the checkout. It may be wise to have a cooler in your car for taking perishable foods home.

### ✓ Eggs and Dairy Products

- Make sure containers are cold when purchasing.
- Check **best before** dates and select those which will stay fresh the longest.
- Buy only eggs from a refrigerated display.
- Avoid cracked, dirty, or ungraded eggs.

### ✓ Produce and Bakery

- Keep produce separate from raw meat, fish or poultry in the shopping cart.
- Pre-cut produce such as melons should be refrigerated or stored on ice. While most bakery items are safe, those containing custards, meat or icings made of cream cheese or whipped cream, should be refrigerated.

### ✓ Pre-cooked Foods

- Buy ready-to-eat refrigerated foods **ONLY** if they are refrigerated and feel cold to the touch.
- Observe the habits of the deli operator and the cleanliness of the deli counter. Are hands washed between the handling of different foods? Single-use gloves or deli paper should be used as a barrier between hands and ready-to-eat foods. A clean deli counter will have clean meat slicers, counter tops and floors.
- Buy pre-packaged ready-to-eat foods only if the packages are intact, no tears, rips or open corners.

## ✓ When You Get Home

- Refrigerate perishable foods first. Meat, fish and poultry should be kept in the coldest part of your refrigerator.
- Keep meat and poultry in their store wraps and place in plastic bags or tight containers so that juices do not drip on ready-to-eat food.
- Keep eggs in their original container. Do not store them in the egg compartment on the door as the temperature on the door may be higher than the rest of the refrigerator.
- Before placing your food order in the refrigerator, check the foods already there. Discard foods that are three or four days beyond their **best before** or **sell by** dates. Stored homemade dishes should be discarded after two days.
- Keep your refrigerator set between 2 – 4°C (35°F – 40°F). Consider buying a refrigerator thermometer to place in the refrigerator. Remember that proper refrigeration not only provides food safety, but also enhances food quality.
- Store household cleaning supplies and chemicals away from dry foods.
- Check food labels for storage information. Foods such as salad dressings and ketchup must be refrigerated after opening.

For further information on food safety visit the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture Food Safety website at <http://www.gov.ns.ca/nsaf/foodsafety/>