



Government of Canada Gouvernement du Canada

Safe Food Handling **For People with Weakened Immune Systems**



Canada 

Food Safety Information For People with Weakened Immune Systems

Many people are dealing with serious illnesses and chronic conditions that have had a significant impact on their lives. Some conditions, as well as treatments for certain illnesses, can affect your immune system. This can make it difficult to fight off harmful foodborne bacteria. This situation can lead to serious complications.

Some examples of conditions that can affect your immune system are:

- alcoholism;
- cancer (especially for people receiving chemotherapy);
- diabetes;
- HIV/AIDS;
- organ transplantation.



Increased risk for foodborne illness

Remember that if you are faced with any of these conditions, talk to your doctor. If you are at increased risk, you should take special care when handling and preparing food. Here are some important safe food handling and preparation techniques to help protect yourself from foodborne illness.



Separate

Clean

Chill

Cook

Food to avoid

Temperatures

Separate

Separate raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood from other food in your grocery cart and in your refrigerator. This is to make sure that you are not cross-contaminating your food.

Heat and proper cooking can kill bacteria. But people often eat raw fruit and vegetables. Because they are not heated or cooked, raw fruit and vegetables that have been contaminated by raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood may contain bacteria that can be harmful to you.

Shopping

- Buy cold or frozen food at the end of your shopping.
- Keep your raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood away from other food in your grocery cart, so you don't spread food-borne bacteria from raw food to ready-to-eat food.
- Put raw food in individual plastic bags (found in the produce section and at some meat counters), and pack them separately in your reusable grocery bags.
- If you use reusable grocery bags or bins, make sure to use a specific bag or bin just for raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood. Label the bag or bin with the type of food it carries.



Refrigerator storage



- Keep your raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood separate from other food in the refrigerator at home. Do this by storing them in different containers.
- Place raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood on the bottom shelf of your refrigerator so raw juices won't drip onto other food.

Tip:

To help prevent foodborne illness, avoid spreading liquids from packages onto other foods, cutting boards, utensils, dishes and food preparation surfaces.

Clean

Properly cleaning your hands, kitchen surfaces and utensils, fruit and vegetables and reusable grocery bags will help eliminate bacteria and reduce your risk of foodborne illness.

Hands

- Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds. Washing your hands prevents bacteria from transferring from your hands to food or surfaces.
- You should always wash your hands:
 - ◆ before and after you touch raw meat, poultry, fish or seafood;
 - ◆ after using the washroom;
 - ◆ after handling pets; or
 - ◆ after changing diapers.



Fresh fruit and vegetables

- Wash your fresh fruit and vegetables gently under cool, running, drinkable water before eating them or cooking them.
- Use a vegetable scrub brush on produce that have a firm skin, such as carrots, potatoes, melons and squash.
- Don't soak your fresh fruit and vegetables in a sink full of water because the sink can harbour bacteria that can transfer to the fresh produce.
- It isn't necessary to use anything other than water to wash your produce.



Kitchen surfaces and utensils

- If you've used a plate or utensils to handle raw food, don't use them again until you've washed them thoroughly in the dishwasher or in warm, soapy water. Or use clean plates and utensils.
- You may want to use the following solution to help you sanitize surfaces and utensils:
 - ◆ Combine 5 mL (1 tsp) of bleach with 750 mL (3 cups) of water in a labelled spray bottle.
 - ◆ Spray the bleach solution on the surface/utensil and let stand briefly.
 - ◆ Rinse with lots of clean, drinkable running water and air dry (or use clean towels).

Reusable grocery bags

Wash your reusable grocery bags frequently, especially if you are carrying raw meat, poultry, fish or seafood.



Chill

It is extremely important to keep cold food cold and hot food hot so that your food never reaches the “temperature danger zone.” That is where bacteria can grow quickly and cause foodborne illness.

Defrosting

- Defrost your raw meat, poultry, fish or seafood in the refrigerator, in a microwave or immersed in cold water.
- Food that has been defrosted in the microwave should be cooked as soon as possible after thawing.
- Don't refreeze thawed food.
- If you are defrosting a large piece of meat, such as a turkey that may not fit easily in the fridge, immerse it in cold water, keeping it in its original wrapping. Change the water often (for example, every 30 minutes) to make sure that the water continues to be cold.
- Immediately sanitize sinks, kitchen surfaces or containers that come in contact with raw meat, poultry, fish or seafood.

Storing

- Keep your raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood cold. Refrigerate or freeze them as soon as you get home from the grocery store. Make sure your refrigerator is set at **4°C** (40°F) or lower and your freezer at **-18°C** (0°F) or lower. This will keep your food out of the temperature danger zone, (between **4°C** (40°F) to **60°C** (140°F)), where bacteria can grow quickly.



- Deli meats can be more risky for people with weakened immune systems to eat. If you still choose to eat deli meats, refer to the “Select the Safer Alternative” chart at the end of this booklet. Store deli meats in the refrigerator. Use pre-packaged deli meats within 4 days, preferably 2-3 days, after opening; even if this date is different than the best-before date. Best-before dates apply to unopened packages only. Deli-meats sliced at the grocer should also be eaten within 4 days, preferably 2-3 days.
- Store cut fruit and vegetables in the refrigerator.
- You can cool leftovers quickly by placing them in shallow containers. Refrigerate as soon as possible or within two hours.
- Never leave raw meat, poultry, fish, seafood or leftovers out on the counter for longer than two hours. After two hours at room temperature, levels of bacteria in your food can become dangerous. You can't tell if food is unsafe by its smell or taste. When in doubt, throw it out!



Cook

Proper cooking is the best way to make sure your food is safe to eat. Bacteria such as *E. coli*, *Salmonella* and *Listeria* are killed by heat.

Safe internal temperature



- Always remember to cook raw meat, poultry, fish and seafood to a safe internal temperature to avoid food-borne illness. You should use a digital food thermometer to check (see chart at the end of this booklet).

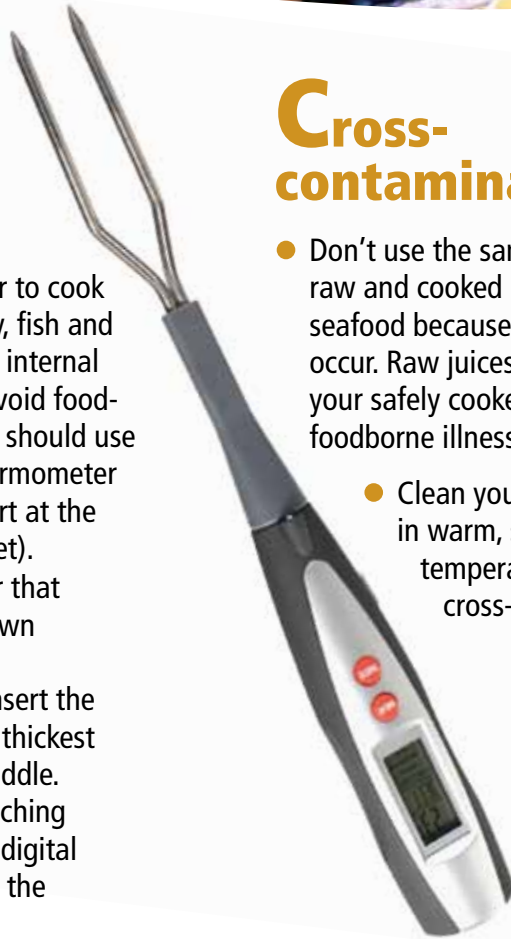
Colour alone is not a reliable indicator that meat is safe to eat. Meat can turn brown before all the bacteria are killed.

- Remove the food from the heat and insert the digital food thermometer through the thickest part of the meat, all the way to the middle. Make sure the thermometer is not touching any bones. For hamburgers, insert the digital food thermometer through the side of the patty, all the way to the middle.
- If you are cooking a number of pieces of meat, poultry, fish or seafood, make sure to insert the thermometer into several of the thickest pieces to verify that the appropriate temperature has been reached, because food can cook unevenly.



Cross-contamination

- Don't use the same plates or utensils for raw and cooked meat, poultry, fish or seafood because cross-contamination can occur. Raw juices can spread bacteria to your safely cooked food and this can cause foodborne illness.
- Clean your digital food thermometer in warm, soapy water between temperature readings to avoid cross-contamination.







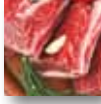




Tip: Refrigerated smoked seafood can be eaten safely when fully cooked to a safe internal temperature, such as in a casserole.

Select the Safer Alternative

(Always refer to the Internal Cooking Temperatures Chart on the next page.)

Some food, such as those listed below, can be a higher risk for people who have a weakened immune system to eat because of the way they are produced and the conditions and length of time they are stored. If you are faced with such a condition, you can minimize your chances of contracting foodborne illness by avoiding some types of food or by choosing a safer alternative.

Type of Food	Food to Avoid	Safer Alternatives
 Deli meats	Non-dried deli meats such as bologna, roast beef and turkey breast.	Dried and salted deli meats such as salami and pepperoni. Non-dried deli meats heated throughout to steaming hot.
 Dairy products	Raw or unpasteurized dairy products, including soft and semi-soft cheese, such as Brie, Camembert and blue-veined cheese.	Pasteurized dairy products, hard cheeses such as Colby, Cheddar, Swiss and Parmesan.
 Hot Dogs	Hot dogs straight from the package without further heating.	Hot dogs thoroughly cooked to a safe internal temperature. The middle of the hot dog should be steaming hot or 74°C (165°F).
 Pâtés and meat spreads	Refrigerated pâtés and meat spreads.	Pâtés and meat spreads sold in cans or those that do not require refrigeration until after opening.
 Eggs and egg products	Raw or lightly cooked eggs or egg products, including salad dressings, cookie dough or cake batter, sauces and drinks such as homemade eggnog.	Egg dishes thoroughly cooked to a safe internal temperature. Eggs should be cooked until the yolk is firm. Homemade eggnog must be heated to 71°C (160°F).
 Seafood	Raw oysters, clams and mussels.	Cook until the shell has opened.
	Raw seafood such as sushi.	Seafood cooked to a safe internal temperature of 74°C (165°F).
	Refrigerated smoked seafood.	Smoked seafood in cans that do not require refrigeration until after opening.
 Meat and poultry	Raw or undercooked meat or poultry such as steak tartare.	Meat and poultry cooked to a safe internal temperature. (Refer to the Internal Cooking Temperatures Chart.)
 Fruit juice and cider	Unpasteurized fruit juice and cider.	Unpasteurized fruit juice and cider brought to a rolling boil and cooled. Pasteurized fruit juice and cider.
 Sprouts	Raw sprouts such as alfalfa, clover, radish and mung beans.	Thoroughly cooked sprouts.

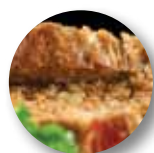
You can't tell by looking.
Use a digital food thermometer
to be sure!

Internal Cooking Temperatures



**Beef, veal
and lamb**
(pieces and
whole cuts)

63°C (145°F) Medium rare
71°C (160°F) Medium
77°C (170°F) Well done



**Ground meat and
meat mixtures**
(for example, burgers,
sausages, meatballs,
meatloaf, casseroles)

71°C (160°F) Beef, veal, lamb and pork
74°C (165°F) Poultry



Poultry
(for example, chicken,
turkey, duck)

74°C (165°F) Pieces
85°C (185°F) Whole



Pork
(pieces and
whole cuts)

71°C (160°F)



Egg dishes

74°C (165°F)



Others
(for example, hot dogs,
stuffing, leftovers, seafood)

74°C (165°F)

What the Government of Canada does to keep our food supply safe

The Government of Canada is committed to food safety.

Health Canada establishes regulations and standards relating to the safety and nutritional quality of foods sold in Canada. Through inspection and enforcement activities, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency verifies that food sold in Canada meets Health Canada's requirements.

For more information on food safety, please visit the following websites:

Healthy Canadians:
www.healthycanadians.gc.ca

Health Canada:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency:
www.inspection.gc.ca

The Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education's Be Food Safe Canada program:
www.befoodsafe.ca

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