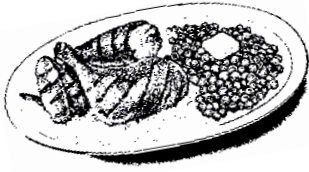


# Safe Food in a Hurry

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Foodborne illness can lead to time away from your job and can cause family misery. Work to prevent foodborne illness as you buy, store, cook, and serve food. When you must care for food in a hurry, keep the food safe by following these rules:

*Keep food hot.*

*Keep food cold.*

*Keep food clean.*

## Keep Food Hot

Most germs that cause foodborne illness are killed when you boil, broil, or roast foods. But when food stays warm (less than 140 °F) for 2 hours or longer, germs can produce poisons that are not destroyed by heating.

Once food is cooked, keep it hot until served; refrigerate leftovers at once. Leaving food at room temperature for more than 2 hours (including preparation time) may allow foodborne-illness germs to multiply. These germs seldom change the taste, color, or look of food.

Some foods require special precautions. For example, know what kind of ham you have bought. Some need to be cooked; others are fully cooked and can be eaten as they come from the package. Check the label. If you have any doubts, cook it.

Cook poultry products thoroughly. If you prepare turkey, chicken, or duck in advance for cooking, store it in the refrigerator. Store giblets and stuffing separately. Do not stuff the bird a day or two ahead of the cooking time. Stuff it just before roasting. Refrigerate leftover, deboned poultry and stuffing in separate dishes as soon as possible. This hastens the cooling time.

## Keep Food Cold

Germs cannot multiply fast if the storage temperature is 40 °F or below. Store meat, poultry, eggs, milk, and cheese in the refrigerator. At the grocery store, always pick up meat, poultry, and dairy products last. Take them home and put them in the refrigerator or freezer quickly. If these products get warm, the possibility of foodborne illness and spoilage increases.

When you bring meat home from the store, remove the butcher wrapping and cover it loosely with wax paper. Leave cured and smoked meats, such as bacon, in the original wrap until opened; then rewrap tightly in foil or plastic.

The refrigerator life of meats varies from 1 to 7 days. The most perishable meats are ground beef, veal, lamb, ground pork, and variety meats. They keep only 1 or 2 days in the refrigerator. Fresh beef, veal, pork, lamb, and leftover cooked meat will keep 2 to 4 days in the refrigerator. Smoked sausage, bacon, a smoked whole ham, and corned beef will keep 7 days. Protect your investment in meat; use it before it loses its quality.

The best way to thaw meat and poultry is to leave it in the refrigerator overnight or during the day while you are at work. Alternate methods include thawing it outside the refrigerator in a sealed plastic bag under cold running water, or in the microwave.

Allow it to get just warm enough to thaw and still cool enough to slow down germ growth, particularly on the meat surface. A good time-saver is to cook meat while it is still frozen.

Store luncheon meats and wieners in the refrigerator. Do not treat them as though they cannot have foodborne-illness germs—they can. Even stored in the refrigerator, hot dogs and lunch meats should be used within a week. Open and



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close packages as few times as possible. Handle cold meats (or any meats) with a fork or tongs, not your fingers. Fingers spread germs.

If you take your lunch to work, try preparing, packaging, and freezing sandwiches ahead of time—then making your lunch is a quick process and a safe one, too. By lunch your sandwich is thawed, yet cold enough to prevent bacteria from growing.

## Keep Food Clean

Do not buy foods in containers with these faults: leaking, bulging, or damaged cans; cracked jars or jars with loose or bulging lids. Do not taste or use foods with a foul odor or any food from a can that spurts liquid when you open it. These foods could contain the rare and often fatal botulism poison. Botulism is found more often in home-canned foods than in commercial products; but be careful either way.

If you keep germs off meat, poultry, and dairy products, you avoid problems. Wash utensils, platters, your hands, and countertops with soap and hot water. Germs are a natural part of the environment. You must keep washing them off things, especially off your hands.

Do not handle food if you have infected cuts or sores. Even if you are in a hurry, always cover any sore carefully before handling food.

Be careful so you will not spread germs from raw meat to cooked meat. If you carry raw hamburgers to the grill on a platter, wash the platter before putting the cooked hamburgers back on it. Otherwise, there will be germs on your cooked hamburgers.

Never prepare food to be eaten raw on the same chopping board as cooked food. After cutting raw chicken, wash the chopping board with a good detergent and water. Cutting boards should be sanitized from time to time by dipping them for two to three minutes in a solution containing two teaspoons of chlorine bleach per quart of water and then rinsing thoroughly. This prevents transferring bacteria from one food to another.

Keep pets out of the kitchen, and teach children to wash their hands after playing with pets.

Remember the three key rules to keep food safe even when you are in a hurry:

*Keep food hot.*

*Keep food cold.*

*Keep food clean.*

Under most circumstances, these rules and common sense will protect you and your family from food-borne illness.

If you do get sick, see a doctor. Think about how you stored, cooked, and served foods in the last few days.



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### Information Sheet 1204

Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. GARY B. JACKSON, Director (POD-12-12)