

# Know the FACTS

## Food Safety at Home

Each year, about one in six people contract a foodborne illness, making it one of the most common ways to get sick. Many of these cases can be prevented by following safe food-handling practices. Knowing how to properly clean, prepare, cook and store food helps protect you, your family and guests.

### Clean before you cook

Illness-causing bacteria and viruses like salmonella, E. coli and norovirus can survive in many places around your kitchen, including your hands, food, utensils and hard surfaces.

- **Wash hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water** before handling, preparing or eating food.
- **Wipe down kitchen surfaces** and spills thoroughly. Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and countertops after preparing each food item and before moving on to the next.
- **Wash and scrub fruits and vegetables** under running water (no soap), even if you'll be peeling them. **Do not wash raw meat, poultry or eggs**, as that can spread bacteria.



### Cook and store food at safe temperatures

Bacteria that cause food poisoning grow fastest in the “**danger zone**,” which is **between 41°F and 135°F**. Here’s how to prepare and cook foods safely:

- **Never thaw or marinate foods on the counter** because bacteria can multiply quickly at room temperature. Instead, thaw and marinate food in the refrigerator, or thaw using cold water or the microwave and then cook immediately.
- **Use a food thermometer and follow package cooking instructions** to make sure all food reaches a safe minimum internal temperature that kills harmful bacteria.
- **Keep hot foods at 135°F or above as they’re being served.**
- **Refrigerate perishable foods within two hours** (or one hour if the environmental temperature is 90°F or hotter) to slow bacterial growth.

### Store food safely

Keeping food out of the “danger zone” and storing it the right way in the refrigerator helps stop bacteria from growing and keeps leftovers safe to eat.

- **Keep your fridge at 41°F or below and your freezer at 0°F.** Check the temperatures often with a thermometer.

- **Know your expiration dates.**
- **Leftovers can be kept in the refrigerator** for up to seven days or in the freezer for 3-4 months. Throw away food that hasn't been properly refrigerated, is past its safe storage time or looks, smells or feels spoiled.
- **Keep your fridge clean and organized** by wiping up spills right away, covering foods and checking leftovers often. Store foods in the right spots (raw meat on the bottom, ready-to-eat foods on top) and check expiration dates before consuming.

## Keep food safe during an emergency

Emergencies like power outages and flooding can make food unsafe to consume. Knowing what to keep, what to throw away and when to do it can help prevent illness.

### During emergencies

- **Power outages:** Keep fridge and freezer doors closed. Food stays cold about 4 hours in the fridge and 24–48 hours in the freezer. Use ice if you have it, and throw away food that gets too warm.
- **Flooding:** Throw away any food or drink that touched floodwater, especially if it's in damaged or non-waterproof packaging. Clean and sanitize dishes, utensils and surfaces before using them again.

### Before emergencies

- **Store food on high shelves** if flooding is possible.
- **Keep coolers and ice packs ready** for power outages.
- **Stock enough shelf-stable food for a few days** that don't require refrigeration.
- **Pack freezer items close together** to stay cold longer.
- **Use thermometers** in your fridge and freezer to check that food stays at safe temperatures (41°F or below in the fridge and 0°F or below in the freezer).



### Additional resources:

- **Hamilton County Public Health environmental health division:** [bit.ly/HCPHEnvHealth](http://bit.ly/HCPHEnvHealth)
- **Ohio Department of Health:** [bit.ly/ODHFoodSafetyAtHome](http://bit.ly/ODHFoodSafetyAtHome)
- [FoodSafety.gov](http://FoodSafety.gov)