

For more information about this fact sheet, contact Risk Management at
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This fact sheet provides information on properly handling food during church activities and camps to avoid food-borne illness.

Why is food safety important?

About one in six people gets sick from food poisoning each year. Food poisoning may be caused by bacteria, viruses, or toxic substances. Symptoms usually include nausea, stomach cramping, diarrhea, and vomiting, and can last from 12 hours to a week or longer. Most people experiencing food poisoning will recover without any lasting effects from their illness. For some, however, the effects can be devastating and even deadly. Serious effects associated with common types of food poisoning can include kidney failure, chronic arthritis, brain and nerve damage, and even death.

Food poisoning may be caused by food that is undercooked, improperly washed, or accidentally contaminated during harvesting, preparation, or storage; it may also be spread person to person. It is important to take proper precautions to avoid contracting and spreading illness.

Steps to Keep Food Safe

- Wash hands and surfaces often.
- Don't cross-contaminate.
- Cook to the right temperature.
- Store at the right temperature.

Wash Hands and Surfaces Often

Illness-causing bacteria and viruses can survive in many places, including on hands, utensils, and cutting boards. Unless hands, utensils, and surfaces are washed the right way, bacteria can spread to food and others.

- Wash hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and running water before preparing food. Wash hands before and after any activity that has potential to cause contamination.
- Wash surfaces and utensils after each use with hot, soapy water. A solution of 1 tablespoon chlorine bleach in 1 gallon of water may also be used to sanitize washed surfaces and utensils.
- When ill or caring for someone who is ill, do not prepare food for others.
- Wash fruits and vegetables, but not meat, poultry, or eggs. Washing meat and poultry can cause splashing that may contaminate surrounding areas.

Don't Cross-Contaminate

Even after hands and surfaces are thoroughly cleaned, raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs can still spread illness-causing bacteria to ready-to-eat foods. Keep these foods separate.

- Use separate cutting boards and plates for produce and for meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs. Use separate plates and utensils for cooked and raw foods.
- Before using them again, thoroughly wash plates, utensils, and cutting boards that have contacted raw meat, poultry, seafood, or eggs.
- Once a cutting board gets excessively worn or develops hard-to-clean grooves, consider replacing it.
- Place raw meat, poultry, and seafood in containers or sealed plastic bags to prevent their juices from dripping or leaking. If these foods will not be used within a few days, freeze them instead of refrigerating.

Cook to the Right Temperature

Bacteria that cause food poisoning multiply most quickly in the “danger zone” between 40 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit (°F). Cooked food is safe only after it has been heated to a high enough temperature to kill harmful bacteria. Color and texture alone do not indicate whether food is done; use a food thermometer to be sure food has been properly cooked.

- Consult the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) “Thermometer Placement and Temperatures” guide for correct thermometer use ([link found below](#)).
- Keep food hot after cooking (at 140°F or above).
- If it will not be eaten right away, keep food above the safe temperature of 140°F by using a heat source like a chafing dish, warming tray, or slow cooker.
- To make sure harmful bacteria have been killed in foods when using a microwave, cook them to 165°F or higher.

Store at the Right Temperature

Cold temperatures slow the growth of illness-causing bacteria. It is important to chill food promptly and properly. Marinating and thawing food on the counter at room temperature are some of the riskiest practices when preparing food.

- Make sure the fridge and freezer are cooled to the right temperature. The fridge should be between 40°F and 32°F, and the freezer should be at 0°F or below.
- Pack the refrigerator with care. To properly chill food (and slow bacteria growth), cold air must be allowed to circulate in the fridge. It is important not to over pack the fridge. Dividing leftovers into several clean, shallow containers will allow food to chill faster.
- Place perishable foods into the fridge or freezer within two hours of preparation. On days with a temperature of 90°F or above, cut this time down to one hour.
- Thaw meat, poultry, and seafood in the refrigerator whenever possible, as this is the safest way to thaw food.
- As a safe alternative to the refrigerator, thaw food in cold water or in the microwave. Food thawed in cold water or the microwave should be cooked

- immediately. It is also safe to cook foods from a frozen state.
- To marinate food safely, always marinate it in the refrigerator.
 - Do not eat food that has been frozen or refrigerated for longer than the recommended time, since looking at or smelling food does not always indicate whether harmful bacteria have started growing in leftovers or refrigerated foods. Consult the “Storage Times for the Refrigerator and Freezer” page (link found below) of foodsafety.gov for safety guidelines.

Information for this fact sheet was adapted from the Food Safety website by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: www.foodsafety.gov

Additional Resources

“Cooking for Groups: A Volunteer’s Guide to Food Safety,” United States Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service:

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/cooking-for-groups-a-volunteers-guide-to-food-safety>

“Storage Times for the Refrigerator and Freezer,” foodsafety.gov:

www.foodsafety.gov/keep/charts/storagetimes.html

Recreation Properties Poster - [A Healthy Camper Is a Happy Camper](#)

Meetinghouse Warming Kitchen Poster - [Safe Food Is Healthy Food](#)