The Importance of Preventing Foodborne Illness

What is foodborne illness?

Foodborne illness occurs when people eat food that has been contaminated with high levels of germs such as bacteria, viruses, and toxins.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that each year 48 million people get sick from foodborne illnesses. The most at risk of getting sick include older adults, pregnant women, young children, and anyone with a weakened immune system.

Safe food handling practices are the best way to prevent foodborne illness because these practices decrease the amount of bacteria present or prevent viruses or toxins from contaminating the food we eat in the first place.

Handling your Meals from Meals on Wheels

If you do not plan to eat the hot meal right away, refrigerate it immediately. You can leave it in the refrigerator for a couple of days before reheating it to eat.

Hot Meals

- Reheat in the microwave:
  - Remove food from the packaging. Place in a glass or ceramic container or plastics labeled for microwave use. Cover foods with a lid or microwave-safe plastic wrap to prevent splattering. Cook for 2-4 minutes on high power.

  - To reheat in the oven:
    - Preheat the oven to 350°. Peel back the seal from the corners of the tray to vent. Bake for 15-20 minutes. All tray compartments should be hot and steaming when ready!

Cold Meals

- Immediately refrigerate foods that you do not plan to eat right away. These include milk, products made with milk, canned or cut up fruit, juices, salads, and sandwiches.

  - These foods, except for the milk that has an expiration date, should be thrown out if not used in 3 days. Fresh whole fruits, breads, rolls and crackers do not need refrigeration but should be eaten within a week.

Freezing Meals

If you do not plan to eat the hot meal in a couple of days you will need to throw it out unless you freeze it. However, be sure to use the frozen meal within 60 day, always check the date on the meals label.

  - It is best to let the meal thaw in the refrigerator before reheating and then follow the directions above.
  - If frozen, microwave for 3-5 minutes on high or bake in 350° oven for 30-40 minutes.
Tips and Tricks to Preventing Foodborne Illness

1. Hand Washing

Hand washing helps to keep us healthy. Hands can be the main pathway for bacteria transfer.

- Wash hands before and after most activities, especially when soiled
- Always use hot soapy water
- Wash for at least 20 seconds
- Sing Happy Birthday twice for timing hand washing!

2. Cross Contamination

Cross contamination can happen in 3 ways:
- Biological: bacteria, viruses or fungi
- Physical: glass, metal or plastic
- Chemical: cleaners or sanitizers

Always use a new cutting board and utensils when switching foods.

Clean and sanitize all work surfaces before using them. This helps to make sure all surfaces are free of bacteria.

Remember to wash off fruits and vegetable before using but it is not necessary to wash meat or poultry.

3. Proper Cooking Temperatures

A thermometer should always be used to check temperatures of food.

- Poultry: 165°F
- Ground Meat: 160°F
- Beef, Pork, Veal or Lamb (Steaks, Chops or Roasts): 145°F
- Fish & Shellfish: 145°F
- Eggs: 160°F
- Leftovers & Casseroles: 165°F

After food is cooked, keep it hot at 140°F or above.

Keep food out of the “Danger Zone” (40°F-140°F)

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4. Storing Food Properly

Storing food at proper temperatures and in proper places is important.

- Hold hot food at 140°F or above and cold food at 40°F or below
- Keep raw meat, poultry and eggs at the bottom of the refrigerator and ready to eat foods like produce, cheese and lunch meat at the top
- Food that spoil quickly should be refrigerated within 2 hours
- Always defrost food in the refrigerator not on the counter
- Check canned goods for rust, denting or bulging before buying.
- Damaged canned foods may contain harmful bacteria.

How long can I keep this in the Refrigerator or Freezer?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Refrigerator (40°F or below)</th>
<th>Freezer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beef, Veal, Lamb &amp; Pork</td>
<td>Steak</td>
<td>3 to 5 days</td>
<td>6 to 12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chops</td>
<td>3 to 5 days</td>
<td>4 to 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Roasts</td>
<td>3 to 5 days</td>
<td>4 to 12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry</td>
<td>Chicken or Turkey, whole</td>
<td>1 to 2 days</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chicken of Turkey, pieces</td>
<td>1 to 2 days</td>
<td>9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamburger &amp; other Ground Meats</td>
<td>Hamburger, ground beef, turkey, veal, pork, lamb and mixtures of different ground meats</td>
<td>1 to 2 days</td>
<td>3 to 4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot Dogs</td>
<td>Opened Package</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>1 to 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unopened Package</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>1 to 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacon and Sausage</td>
<td>Bacon</td>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sausage (raw: chicken, turkey, pork or beef)</td>
<td>1 to 2 days</td>
<td>1 to 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch Meat</td>
<td>Opened package</td>
<td>3 to 5 days</td>
<td>1 to 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unopened package</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>1 to 2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salads</td>
<td>Egg, chicken, ham, tuna, macaroni salad</td>
<td>3 to 5 days</td>
<td>Does not freeze well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soups &amp; Stews</td>
<td>Vegetable or meat added</td>
<td>3 to 4 days</td>
<td>2 to 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leftovers</td>
<td>Cooked meat or poultry</td>
<td>3 to 4 days</td>
<td>2 to 6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chicken nuggets or patties</td>
<td>3 to 4 days</td>
<td>1 to 3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pizza</td>
<td>3 to 4 days</td>
<td>1 to 2 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Foodborne Illness Word Search

Bacteria  Fruits
Beef  Hand washing
Cleaning  Poultry
contamination  prevention
Cutting board  sick
Dented cans  Storage
Eggs  Temperature
Food borne illness  Vegetables
food poisoning  Virus

References

Do you have a questions or concerns about what to eat?
If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County’s Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible to have a free consultation with a Registered Dietitian.
Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at 518-372-1622, ext. 269. Leave a message, if necessary, for dietitian to call you back.
Check out our website for nutrition resources:
http://cceschenectady.org/nutrition-for-seniors

Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services denies no person services or access to service based upon race, color, sex, religion, national origin, marital status and/or handicapping conditions. Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services is primarily funded with County tax dollars. Supplemental funding is through the New York State Office for the Aging under Title III-B/D, III-C-1, III-C-2, III-F of the Federal Older Americans Act, and New York State Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly (EISEP), Community Services for the Elderly Act (CSE), Congregate Services Initiative (CSI), and the Wellness In Nutrition (WLN).

Consumer-centered access for long-term care information, referrals and assessments.
For information, call 382-8481, #9, ext.304
OFA- Foodborne illness-April 2019