

September is National Food Safety Education Month



1 in 6 Americans experience foodborne illness every year. Disease causing bacteria or pathogens contaminate food and can cause illness, also known as “food poisoning”. Symptoms of illness can occur within 1-3 days of eating contaminated food but can even occur within 20 minutes or up to 6 weeks later. Symptoms of foodborne illness can include vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and flu-like symptoms of fevers, headaches and body aches. Although most people will recover from a foodborne illness within a short time some can develop chronic, severe or life-threatening health problems. Bacteria and pathogens you may have heard of include Salmonella, E. Coli, Hepatitis A and Listeria. Foodborne illness can result in hospitalizations and even death (an estimated 3,000 per year).

High risk populations for developing foodborne illness includes pregnant women and their unborn babies, young children less than 5 years old, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems (those with cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS and transplant patients). It is especially important for them to avoid certain foods as listed below.

The food supply in the United States is very safe but contamination can still occur. Choosing the right foods along with safe food handling and storage can reduce the risk and keep families safe from food poisoning.

Choosing Foods:

- Don't buy eggs that are cracked or damaged cartons.
- Don't buy meat, poultry or seafood or in damaged or leaking packages.
- Avoid wilted, brown or unwashed produce. Choose crisp fresh vegetables or made to order salad.
- Avoid fresh squeezed or unpasteurized juice or apple cider.
- Avoid unpasteurized soft cheese like Brie, Camembert, feta and queso fresco. Choose pasteurized cheeses.



Resources

[Food Safety Education Month | FDA](#)

www.dshs.wa.gov/fwfb

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Simple Steps of Food Handling and Storage:

1. Clean: Wash hands and surfaces often.

- Wash hands under warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food and after using bathroom, changing diapers, and handling pets.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops with hot soapy water after preparing each food item.
- Use paper towels to clean up kitchen surfaces. If using cloth towels, launder them often in hot cycle.
- Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables under running tap water, including those with skin and rinds not eaten. Scrub with a produce brush. DO NOT use soap or detergent on food. Dry with clean cloth, paper towel or salad spinner.
- With canned goods, clean the lid before opening.
- DO NOT wash meat, poultry, seafood or eggs as washing is more likely to contaminate other surfaces and items in the kitchen.

2. Separate: separate raw meats from other foods.

- Separate raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs from other foods in your grocery cart, grocery bags, and refrigerator.
- Use one cutting board for fresh produce and a separate one for raw meats, poultry, and seafood.
- Never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meats, poultry, seafood, or eggs unless the plate has been washed in hot soapy water.
- Don't reuse marinades used on raw foods unless you bring them to boil first.

3. Cook: Cook to the right temperature

- Color and texture are unreliable indicators of cook temperature. Use a food thermometer to ensure foods are cooked to an internal temperature that destroys.
- Cook eggs until yolk and white are firm.
- When cooking in microwave cover food, stir and rotate for even cooking. If there is no turntable rotate dish 1-2 times by hand.
- Bring sauces, soups and gravy to boil when reheating.

Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures as measured with a food thermometer	
Beef, Pork, Veal, and Lamb (chops, roasts, steaks)	145 °F with a 3 minute rest time
Ground Meat	160 °F
Ham, uncooked (fresh or smoked)	145 °F with a 3 minute rest time
Ham, fully cooked (to reheat)	140 °F
Poultry (ground, parts, whole, and stuffing)	165 °F
Eggs	Cook until yolk and white are firm
Egg Dishes	160 °F
Fin Fish	145 °F or flesh is opaque and separates easily with a fork
Shrimp, Lobster, and Crabs	Flesh is pearly and opaque
Clams, Oysters, and Mussels	Shells open during cooking
Scallops	Flesh is milky white or opaque and firm
Leftovers and Casseroles	165 °F



4. Chill: refrigerate foods promptly

- Check your appliance thermometer to make sure the temperature is consistently 40 degrees F or below and the freezer is 0 degrees F or below. Do not overfill fridge.
- Refrigerate or freeze meat, poultry, eggs and seafood, and other perishables within 2 hours of cooking or purchasing, and refrigerate within 1 hour if the temperature outside is above 90 degrees F.
- Never thaw food at room temperature such as on countertop. Defrost in refrigerator or in cold water or microwave. Food thawed in cold water or in the microwave should be cooked immediately.
- Do not store eggs in door but in colder part in their container.
- Always marinate food in the refrigerator.
- Divide large amounts of leftovers into shallow containers for quicker cooking in the refrigerator. Do not cool outside of fridge.

Seafood and Mercury Levels:

While it is important to limit mercury in the diets of those who are pregnant or breastfeeding and children ages 1-11 years, many types of fish are both nutritious and lower in mercury. Please choose a variety of fish that are lower in mercury. Examples are catfish, clams, cod, salmon, tilapia, trout, tuna, rockfish, and halibut to name a few.

Mercury and metabolite Methylmercury can be harmful to the brain and nervous system if exposed to too much overtime. It is a good idea to remove skin, fat and internal organs where other types of harmful pollutants may accumulate for fish you or friends may catch in local waters.



Foods to Avoid, especially if in High-Risk Group:

- Raw or undercooked meat, poultry, and shellfish (oysters, clams, mussels).
- Raw flour in any type of dough or batter, like cookie dough or cake batter.
- Raw fish, partially cooked seafood like shrimp and crab, and refrigerated smoked seafood.
- Raw or undercooked eggs or foods containing them including some homemade salad dressings, cookie dough and cake batters, and homemade eggnog.
- Raw sprouts like alfalfa and bean.
- Unpasteurized (raw) milk and foods made with this milk like cheese, yogurt or ice cream.
- Pasteurized and unpasteurized queso fresco type cheeses.
- Unpasteurized refrigerated pates or meat spreads.
- Unpasteurized fruit or vegetable juices that contain a warning label.
- Unwashed fresh vegetables including lettuce and salads.
- Hot dogs, luncheon meats, fermented and dry sausage, or other deli style meats unless they are reheated until steaming hot.
- Salads without preservatives like chicken, ham or seafood salad.

Special Topics on Food Safety:

Infant Formula:

- Prepare formula with tap water (if your tap water is safe to drink) or bottled water. If not used immediately then refrigerate right away. Keep refrigerated until feeding and use within 24 hours, discard any formula left in bottle after infant is done feeding. If not finished in 2 hours discard the remaining formula.
- Do not add formula or breast milk to a partially used bottle.
- Clean bottles, rings, caps and nipples in a separate container only for washing bottle items to prevent contamination. Wash with hot soapy water, scrub and rinse in fresh water twice. Allow to air dry. Do not use dish towel as it may transfer germs to the items. Another option is to use a dishwasher on hot cycle, sanitized or heated dry cycle.
- Cronobacter is a germ that can live in dry foods and water and infect powdered formula, powdered milk, herbal teas and flour. It can be found on kitchen surfaces, counters or sinks and in water.
 - It can cause rare but deadly infections in infants: blood infection and meningitis. Increased risk for infants under 2 months, infants with weakened immune systems, premature infants and ill children receiving medical care or chemotherapy. These affected infants may need to use ready to feed or liquid formula or if using powdered to mix with boiling water.
 - Bacteria can get into powdered formula after container is opened.
- Keep powdered formula dry. Do not wipe the inside of the container or lid. Do not open formula on wet counters. If the scoop gets contaminated on a surface or in the sink, then clean it as if you would a bottle and let air dry before using it.

Listeria and Listeriosis: Listeria is a harmful bacteria found in many foods including deli meats, unpasteurized raw milk, and soft cheeses made with unpasteurized milk.

Queso Fresco type cheeses: These are soft fresh cheeses that do not go through aging or ripening process and need to be refrigerated for food safety (Queso Blanco, Queso Fresco, Requeson, Panela, Asadero). They are often eaten crumbed, shredded or pan fried and are used in variety of Hispanic and Latin American style cuisines. These cheese types can support the growth of the bacteria Listeria.

Consuming these foods could cause an infection called Listeriosis which can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth, premature labor, delivery of a low birthweight infant and health problems for newborn, even death. 1/3 of listeriosis cases happen during pregnancy and can lead to miscarriage, premature delivery, stillbirth and serious sickness or death for the newborn baby. Pregnant Hispanic women are 24 times more likely than the general population to get infected as these cheeses are a staple in many Hispanic diets. For more information and recommendations on consuming queso type cheese, click here: [Queso Fresco-type Cheeses Consumer Guidance | FDA.](#)