
Safe Food Handling

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a healthcare professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

Thousands of people in Ontario suffer from food poisoning each year. Most cases of food poisoning occur when people eat food containing bacterial toxins.

Bacteria cannot be detected by sight, smell or taste and at the right temperature, can multiply to millions in a few short hours, which may lead to illness.

Symptoms associated with food poisoning may include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever or cramps.

The good news, however, is that most cases of food poisoning can be avoided altogether if food is handled properly.

When you shop

Buy cold food last and get it home fast :

- On a shopping trip, buy your food last - cold and frozen food last of all. Take food straight home to the refrigerator. Never leave food in a hot car !
- Do not buy food in poor condition. Make sure refrigerated food is cold to the touch. Frozen food should be rock-solid. Canned goods should be free of dents, cracks or bulging lids, which can indicate a serious food poisoning threat.
- Do not buy anything you would not use before the "best before" date.

When you store food

Keep food safe - refrigerate :

- Check the temperature in your refrigerator with an appliance thermometer - you can buy one at a variety or hardware store. To keep bacteria from multiplying, the refrigerator should run at **4°C (40°F)**. The freezer unit should be at **-18°C (0°F)**. Generally, keep your refrigerator as cold as you can without freezing your milk or lettuce.
- Freeze fresh meat, poultry or fish immediately if you cannot use it within a few days.
- Put packages of raw meat, poultry or fish on plates before refrigerating so their juices will not drip on to other food. Raw juices often contain bacteria.

When you prepare food

Keep everything clean and thaw food in the refrigerator :

- Always wash your hands in warm soapy water before preparing food.
- Bacteria can live in kitchen towels, sponges and cloths. Wash these often.
- Keep raw meat, poultry and fish and their juices away from other food. Wash your hands, cutting board and knife in hot, soapy water after cutting up chicken and raw meat and before using the utensils for other food.
- Thaw food in the refrigerator,

- microwave or oven, not on the kitchen counter. At room temperature, bacteria can grow in the outer layers of food before the inside thaws. Marinate in the refrigerator too. When thawing food in microwave ovens, be sure to use microwavable containers.

When you're cooking

Cook thoroughly :

- It takes thorough cooking to kill harmful bacteria. You're taking chances when you eat meat, poultry or fish that are raw or only partly cooked. Hamburger that is red in the middle, and rare and medium-rare steak and roast beef are undercooked from the safety standpoint.
- Cook red meat and poultry to the temperature indicated in the table below. Use a meat thermometer to check that they're cooked all the way through.
- Red meat is done when it's brown or grey inside. Poultry is cooked when its juices run clear. Fish flakes with a fork.
- When you cook ahead, divide large portions of food into small, shallow containers for refrigeration. This ensures safe, rapid cooling.

Microwave safely :

The microwave oven is a great time-saver but has one food safety disadvantage. It sometimes leaves cold spots in food. Bacteria may survive in these spots. Be sure to :

- Cover food with a lid or plastic wrap that is approved for microwaving. The steam can aid thorough cooking. Leave a small section uncovered so steam can

escape, and do not let the wrap touch the food.

- Stir and rotate food for even cooking. If there is no turntable in the oven, rotate the dish by hand once or twice during cooking.
- Observe the "standing" time called for in recipe or package directions. Food finishes cooking during the standing time.
- Use a meat thermometer to check that food is done. Insert it at several spots.

When you serve food

Never leave it out for more than two hours:

- Use clean dishes and utensils to serve food, not those you used when preparing the raw food.
- Never leave perishable food out of the refrigerator for more than two hours. Bacteria that can cause food poisoning grow quickly at warm temperatures.
- Pack lunches in insulated carriers with a cold pack. Warn children never to leave lunches in direct sun or on a warm radiator.
- Carry picnic food in a cooler with a cold pack. When possible, put the cooler in the shade. Keep the lid on as much as you can.
- Party time ? Keep cold party food on ice or serve it on platters from the refrigerator.
- Divide hot party food into smaller serving platters. Keep platters refrigerated until it's time to warm them up for serving.

When you handle leftovers

Use small containers for quick cooling :

- Divide large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow containers for quick

cooling in the refrigerator. Do not pack the refrigerator - cool air must circulate to keep food safe.

- With stuffed poultry or meats, remove stuffing and refrigerate it in separate containers.

Reheating food:

- Bring sauces, soups and gravy to a boil. Heat other leftovers thoroughly to **74°C (165°F)**.
- Microwave leftovers with an approved lid or plastic wrap for thorough heating.

Kept it too long?

When in doubt, throw it out :

Safe refrigerator and freezer storage times for many common foods are shown in the "Cold Storage" table below, but what about something you forgot about and may have kept too long ?

- Never taste food that looks or smells strange to see if you can still use it. Throw it out.
- Is it mouldy ? The mould you see is only the tip of the iceberg. Its poisons are found under the surface of the food. You can sometimes save hard cheese and salamis and firm fruits and vegetables by cutting the mould out - remove a large area around it. But most mouldy food should be discarded.

Is it food poisoning?

If you or a family member develops nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever or cramps, you could have food poisoning. It's not always easy to tell - symptoms can appear anywhere from 30 minutes to two weeks later.

Most often, though, people get sick within four to 48 hours after eating bad food. In more serious cases, food poisoning victims may have nervous system problems like paralysis, double vision or trouble swallowing or breathing. If symptoms are severe or the victim is very young, old, pregnant or already ill, call your doctor or go to the hospital right away.

For more information on food handling, call your local health department listed in the blue pages of your telephone directory.

Chemical Storage

Household chemicals like cleaning compounds should be stored separately and away from food. Household pesticides should not be stored in the kitchen or in other areas where food is stored.

Caution : All household chemical containers should be properly labeled and identified.

If your power is off

Your freezer :

- Without power, a full upright or chest freezer will keep everything frozen for about 2 days. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen for 1 day.
- If power will be coming back on soon, you can make the food last longer by keeping the door shut as much as possible. Ice can keep the freezer cold.
- If power will be off for a longer time period, take food to friends' or neighbours' freezers if you can. If in doubt, throw it out.

Your refrigerator-freezer combination :

- Without power, the refrigerator section will keep food cool for 4-6 hours,

depending on the kitchen temperature. Ice can keep food on the refrigerator shelves cooler.

- If your food has thawed, it can be re-frozen if it still contains ice crystals or feels "refrigerator-cold." Discard any thawed food that has risen to room temperature and remained there for 2 hours or more. Discard any food with a strange colour or odor immediately.

Government of Ontario

For information about health services and resources :

www.health.gov.on.ca

For consumer-friendly health tips and information :

www.HealthyOntario.com

INFOline: 1-877-234-4343;

TTY: 1-800-387-5559

Telehealth Ontario:

1-866-797-0000; TTY 1-866-797-0007

INFOline is open during business hours and can provide general information on healthcare.

Telehealth Ontario is a 24/7 service which uses nurse practitioners to answer your immediate health concerns.

Internal Food Cooking Temperatures(Use a meat thermometer to check)

Product	Variety	Celsius	Fahrenheit
Ground Meat and Meat Mixtures	Turkey, chicken	74	165
	Veal, beef, lamb, pork	71	160
Beef	All cuts	60 - 74	140 - 165
Veal	All cuts	60 - 74	140 - 165
Lamb/Goat	All cuts	60 - 74	140 - 165
Pork	All cuts	71	160
Poultry	Chicken, whole	82	180
	Turkey, whole	82	180
	Poultry breasts	74	165
	Poultry thighs, wings	Cook until juices run clear	Cook until juices run clear
	Stuffing (cooked alone, or in bird)	74	165
	Duck, goose, pheasant	82	180
Ham	Fresh (raw)	71	160
	Pre-cooked (to reheat)	60	140
Seafoods	Fish, shellfish and other seafood	70	158

Cold storage

Product	Variety	Refrigerator (4°C)	Freezer (-18°C)
Eggs	Fresh, in shell	3 weeks	Do not freeze.
	Raw yolks, whites	2-4 days	4 months
	Hard-cooked	1 week	Do not freeze well.
	Liquid pasteurized eggs or egg substitute - opened	3 days	Do not freeze.
	Liquid pasteurized eggs or egg substitute - unopened	10 days	4 months
Mayonnaise	commercial (refrigerate after opening)	2 months	Do not freeze.
TV Dinners, Frozen Casseroles	All brands	Keep frozen until ready to serve.	3-4 months
Deli and Vacuum-Packed Products Store prepared (or homemade)	Egg, chicken, tuna, ham, macaroni, salads	2-3 days	These products do not freeze well.
	Stuffed pork and lamb chops, stuffed chicken breasts	1 day	These products do not freeze well.
	Store-cooked convenience meals	1-2 days	These products do not freeze well.
	Commercial brand vacuum-packed dinners	2 weeks unopened	These products do not freeze well.
Soups and Stews	Vegetable or meat-added	3-4 days	2-3 months
Hamburger, Ground and Stew Meats	Hamburger and stew meats	1-2 days	3-4 months
	Ground turkey, veal, pork, lamb and mixture of them	1-2 days	3-4 months
Hot Dogs	Hot dogs, opened package	1 week	In freezer wrap, 1-2 months
	Hot dogs unopened package	2 weeks	
Lunch Meats	Lunch meats opened	3-5 days	In freezer wrap, 1-2 months
	Lunch meats unopened	2 weeks	
Seafoods	Fish, shellfish and other seafood	1-2 days	4-6 months

Based on materials provided by Scarborough Health Department and the
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service