



## Food Safety: Easy Ways to Make Food Safer

Foodborne illness causes over 4 million illnesses every year in Canada. The symptoms of foodborne illness include:

- Stomach cramps
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

Symptoms usually go away after 1 to 3 days, but in some cases, foodborne illness can be life-threatening. Children under 5 years, pregnant women, seniors and people with a compromised immune system are more likely to get sick. Foodborne illness during pregnancy can make the baby sick before and after birth.

Germs such as bacteria and viruses make us sick. Germs can be picked up in many ways, for example, by petting your dog, handling your pet turtle, changing diapers or preparing raw foods like meat and poultry. Even healthy people can carry germs.

Always follow these food safety rules to help prevent foodborne illness:

### Wash Your Hands

Wash your hands after you use the washroom and before you eat or handle any food. Scrub all parts of your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds and rinsing them under warm water. Dry your hands with a clean cloth or paper towel.

### Wash and Sanitize Surfaces

Wash and sanitize surfaces where you prepare and place foods. Foodborne illness is often caused by spreading germs from raw meat to other foods. This is called cross-contamination.

To reduce the risk for cross-contamination, use separate cutting boards, plates and utensils for raw meat and cooked or ready-to-eat foods. Foods like potato salad, fresh salads, vegetables or fruit should not be prepared on a cutting board used for raw meat (including fish and poultry). After using

cutting boards, plates and utensils for raw meat, wash them in hot soapy water and sanitize them before reusing them for cooked or ready-to-eat foods. Here's how to make your own no-rinse sanitizing solution:

### How to make a 200 ppm no-rinse sanitizing solution:

- Mix 15 mL (1 tablespoon) of household bleach into 4 litres (1 gallon) of water; or mix 5 mL (1 teaspoon) of household bleach into 1 litre (4 cups) of water.
- Allow the sanitizer to contact the surface or utensil for at least 1 minute before wiping off with a clean paper towel or allowing it to air dry.

Use B.C.'s FOODSAFE Chlorine Dilution Calculator tool to make up the proper sanitizer strength based on the concentration of your bleach product  
[www.foodsafe.ca/dilution-calculator.html](http://www.foodsafe.ca/dilution-calculator.html)

**Caution:** Mixing bleach with products that contain acid or ammonia makes a toxic gas that causes serious breathing problems, choking and potentially death.

Dishcloths are ideal breeding grounds for germs. Use a clean dishcloth every day and wash dishcloths frequently in the washing machine. To quickly sanitize your dishcloth, wet it completely and place in the microwave on high for 1 minute. Do not microwave a dry dishcloth.

### Don't Prepare Foods When You Are Sick

Preparing foods while sick can spread germs, such as *Salmonella*, hepatitis A and *E. coli*, to the food. People who eat the food can become sick. If you have diarrhea, vomiting, or infected cuts or sores, don't prepare or serve food for others for 48 hours after your symptoms have resolved. If you must prepare food for your child or another family member when you are sick, wash your hands well and often, and consider wearing gloves that are safe for food handling.

## **Cook Foods to a Safe Internal Temperature – Use a Food Thermometer**

Most germs can be killed by cooking foods to an internal temperature of 74°C (165°F) or hotter before you eat them. For specific cooking temperatures for meat, seafood, poultry and eggs, refer to Health Canada’s Safe Internal Cooking Temperatures Chart [www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/general-food-safety-tips/safe-internal-cooking-temperatures.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/general-food-safety-tips/safe-internal-cooking-temperatures.html).

Always use an instant-read (digital) probe-tip thermometer to check the temperature of the food. Insert the probe tip of the thermometer into the deepest part of the food, without touching the bone if there is one, to make sure the proper internal temperature has been reached. Clean and sanitize your thermometer between temperature readings to avoid cross-contamination.

## **Cool Foods Within 2 Hours**

Improper cooling is one of the leading causes of foodborne illness. Large items such as roasts or soups are difficult to cool quickly. Separate them into smaller portions no more than 7 centimeters (3 inches) deep, and place them in the refrigerator or freezer to cool. Chill food in the fridge within 2 hours after buying or preparing it. Keep the fridge set at 4°C (40°F).

## **Thaw Foods in the Refrigerator**

The safest way to thaw foods is in the refrigerator. Place the food in a drip-proof container and store it on a shelf below uncooked and ready-to-eat foods. To thaw faster, place the food under cold, running water or in the microwave. Foods thawed in running water or in the microwave should be cooked immediately.

## **Reheat Foods to 74°C (165°F)**

If reheating leftovers, reheat to at least 74°C (165°F) to kill germs that may have been introduced into the leftovers during cooling and storage. Plan to reheat only what you need for that meal. Leftovers should only be reheated once. Use refrigerated leftovers within 2 to 4 days.

## **Microwave Cooking to a Safe Internal Temperature**

Cook or reheat foods in a microwave until all parts of the food reach an internal temperature of 74°C

(165°F) or the temperature stated on the cooking instructions. Use a microwave-safe container and cover foods with a microwave-safe lid to trap steam. Stir or rotate food halfway through cooking for even heating. Let the food stand for 2 minutes at the end of heating before checking the temperature with a probe tip food thermometer.

## **Keep Foods out of the Danger Zone**

Germs grow rapidly between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F). Foods such as meat, poultry, milk products, eggs and prepared meals must be kept hotter than 60°C (140°F) or colder than 4°C (40°F).

## **Protect Your Food from Germs**

Transport and refrigerate perishable food as quickly as possible. This helps prevent the growth of germs. Cover or wrap ready-to-eat foods and store them in the fridge on a shelf above uncooked foods. Always read the label for storage instructions.

## **If in Doubt, Throw it Out**

Do not take chances with your food. Remember, contaminated foods may not look or smell bad, so if in doubt, throw it out. Write the date on the food package or container before you put it in the fridge. This will help you remember how long it has been there.

## **For More Information**

For more information, see the following:

- [HealthLinkBC File #59b Food Safety for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #59c Food Safety: Instructions on Food Labels](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #76 Foods to Avoid for People at Higher Risk of Food-borne Illness](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #85 Hand Washing: Help Stop the Spread of Germs](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Food Safety in Children Older than 1 Year Preventing Foodborne Illness](#)
- [BCCDC Food & Your Health](#)



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