



Food Safety: Easy Ways to Make Food Safe

Hundreds of British Columbians get sick from food-borne illness, also known as food poisoning, every day. The symptoms of food-borne illness include:

- stomach cramps;
- nausea;
- vomiting; and
- diarrhea.

The symptoms usually go away after 1 to 3 days. Health problems including death, may occur in serious cases of food-borne illness.

Pathogens are germs such as bacteria and viruses that make us sick. Pathogens can be picked up in many ways, such as, by petting your dog, handling your pet turtle, changing diapers or preparing raw foods, especially meats and poultry. Even healthy people can carry pathogens.

Always follow these food safety rules to help prevent food-borne illness.

Wash Your Hands

Wash your hands after you use the washroom, and before you eat or handle any food. Hand washing includes scrubbing 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. Food-borne illness is often caused by spreading pathogens from raw meat to other foods. This is called cross-contamination.

Cross-contamination can occur when the same cutting board, plate or utensil used to prepare raw meat are then used to prepare other foods such as vegetables or ready-to-eat foods.

To reduce the risk for cross-contamination, use separate cutting boards, plates and utensils to prepare raw foods and to serve ready-to-eat foods.

Wash cutting boards, utensils and plates with hot soapy water and sanitize them before reusing them for cooked or ready-to-eat foods. You can make your own 200 ppm (parts per million) 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 to air dry.

Use Public Health Ontario's chlorine dilution calculator tool to make up the proper sanitizer strength based on the concentration of your bleach product
www.publichealthontario.ca/en/ServicesAndTools/Tools/Pages/Dilution-Calculator.aspx

Wash your dishcloth frequently, and change it daily. Dishcloths are ideal breeding grounds for pathogens. To quickly sanitize your dishcloth, wet it and place in the microwave on high for 1 minute.

Don't Prepare Foods When You Are Sick

Preparing foods while sick can spread pathogens to the food. Some of these, such as *Salmonella*, Hepatitis A and *E. coli* can be then passed on to people who eat the food and become ill. Any person who is ill, for example has symptoms of diarrhea or vomiting, or who has infected cuts or sores, should not handle, prepare, or serve food to anyone.

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

Some foods, for example, meats, poultry and fish, and foods made with these ingredients can contain pathogens. Most pathogens can be killed by cooking foods to an internal temperature of 74°C (165°F) or hotter before you eat them.

For more specific cooking temperatures 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.

Always use a food thermometer to check the temperature of the food. Insert an instant-read 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

Cooked food must be cooled to 20°C within 2 hours and to 4°C within 4 hours. Improper cooling is one of the leading causes of food-borne illness. Large items such as roasts or soups are difficult to cool down quickly. Separate them into smaller portions no more than 7 centimeters (3 inches) deep, and place in the refrigerator or freezer to cool.

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. For faster thawing, you can thaw the food under cold, running water, or in the microwave. Cook thawed foods immediately.

Reheat Foods to 74°C (165°F)

If reheating leftovers, reheat to at least 74°C (165°F) to kill pathogens that may have been introduced into the leftovers during cooling and storage.

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 in the microwave halfway during cooking to improve heat distribution. Let the food stand for 2 minutes at the end of heating before checking the temperature with a food thermometer.

Keep Foods out of the Danger Zone

Pathogens can grow rapidly between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F). Foods such as meat, poultry,

milk products, and eggs must be kept hotter than 60°C (140°F) or colder than 4°C (40°F).

Protect Your Food from Pathogens

Transport and refrigerate your perishable food as quickly as possible. This helps prevent the growth of pathogens. 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 to help you remember how long it has been there.

For More Information

For more information on food safety, visit the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education <http://befoodssafe.ca/>, or see the following HealthLinkBC Files:

- [HealthLinkBC Files #59b Food Safety for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #59c Food Safety: Instructions on Food Labels](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #76 Foods to Avoid for People at Higher Risk of Food-borne Illness](#)
- [HealthLinkBC Files #85 Hand Washing for Parents and Children](#)

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/healthfiles or your local public health unit.

Click on www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** for non-emergency health information and services in B.C.

For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance, call 7-1-1 in B.C.

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