

How can I keep my food safe as I navigate limited grocery shopping and having my food delivered?

To keep your food safe, fresh, and spoilage-free, it is important to make sure you refrigerate food that is perishable as soon as possible. The general guidelines if you are not going to immediately prepare and eat the food, or for the leftovers after eating, are to refrigerate food within 2 hours, but that is reduced to 1 hour if the outdoor temperature is over 90°F.

If you are scheduling a food delivery, make sure to store any perishable food like meat, eggs, milk into the refrigerator right away. Not only will this help keep your food fresh, but it will minimize your risk of contracting a foodborne illness.

Remember that once a non-perishable food item such as canned soup or beans is opened, it must, in general, be handled like a perishable food – cover it and put it in the refrigerator.

No matter what, it is really important to remember that keeping your food safe at home keeps your family safe from foodborne illnesses. The CDC estimates that 1 in 6 Americans get sick from food every year.

Check your steps:



- 1. Clean.** Wash your hands & surfaces often, especially before preparing foods.
- 2. Separate.** Use separate cutting boards when preparing raw meats & fresh ready-to-eat (RTE) foods like produce. If you have one cutting board, clean it between raw and RTE foods.
- 3. Cook.** Cook food to proper temperatures. Use a food thermometer.
- 4. Chill.** Refrigerate perishable food promptly.

How do I protect myself from COVID-19, and how does this relate to food?

Handwashing is an important measure to protect us from COVID-19. Handwashing also helps make our food safer by protecting us from the types of disease-causing organisms that can make us sick in food.



How do I convince a young child (or anyone else) to wash their hands?

Proper handwashing takes 20 seconds, so you can make it fun by emphasizing that making bubbles helps wash away germs that can make you sick. Sing the “Happy Birthday Song” two times, which is a fun way of keeping track of the time.



If you do not have access to soap (liquid is better than bar soap if you have it), and your hands are not heavily soiled, you can use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. To use hand sanitizer properly, cover all the surfaces of your hands with hand sanitizer and rub your hands together until they are dry.

FOOD SAFETY

During COVID-19



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
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Food Safety

New Challenges in Keeping Our Food at Home Safe

As many of us adjust to life at home to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, grocery shopping and the way we think about our food supply has temporarily changed.



We answer your questions about making sure the food we prepare at home is safe under these challenging new circumstances.

What is COVID-19?

The Coronavirus that causes the disease COVID-19 was detected for the first time in late 2019. Since then, it has spread around the world, leading to social distancing in an effort to help prevent the virus from spreading in our communities.

Can the COVID-19 Coronavirus Spread through Food?

The Coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is a respiratory virus that is typically transmitted person-to-person through aerosols, where a person typically needs to sneeze, cough, or be very close to transmit the virus to you.

There is no existing evidence that you can get COVID-19 from food.

Can the COVID-19 Coronavirus Survive on Surfaces?

A recent study indicates that the virus may survive for 24 hours on cardboard and 2-3 days on hard surfaces like metals and plastics.



How long is fresh meat safe?

Fresh or uncooked meat/poultry products voluntarily place “sell-by” dates to keep track of inventory. It is best to cook or freeze beef, veal, pork, or lamb within 3-5 days of purchase. For fresh chicken, turkey, ground meat and ground poultry, they should be cooked or frozen within 1-2 days of purchase.

How do I safely thaw and cook frozen food?

Frozen food should be thawed in the refrigerator, in cold water, or in the microwave. You do need to plan ahead to thaw food safely with cold water or in the microwave.

- **Thawing in the refrigerator.** Make sure to place food in a leak-proof package/container or bag so that juices do not drip onto food and potentially make you sick.
- **Cold water thawing.** Food must be in a leak-proof package or bag. Submerge the bag in cold tap water and change the water every 30 minutes. Once thawed completely, the food must be cooked. Also, food that is cold-water thawed must be cooked before refreezing.
- **Microwave thawing.** If you thaw raw meat in the microwave, it must be immediately cooked, since some parts of the food may become too warm. Do not delay in cooking the food thoroughly, since keeping it warm can allow bacteria to grow. Cook before refreezing.

For safe cooking, follow the USDA recommended guidelines at isitdoneyet.gov and use a food safety thermometer.

What does that date mean on the food label?

The meaning of the date on your food label depends on the phrase. Here is a breakdown of what these labels usually mean:

- **Best if Use By/Before.** This refers to the best flavor or quality and is not a purchase or safety date.
- **Sell-By.** This is a date is used by stores, so they know how long to display products for sale, and for the store to manage inventory. This is not a safety date.
- **Use-by.** A recommended date to ensure quality. This does not refer to food safety. The exception is infant formula. Do not use infant formula beyond this date.
- **Freeze-by.** This date tells you when a product should be frozen by for the highest quality, it is not a purchase or safety date.

Is that food safe to eat if it is beyond the date on the label?

Except for infant formula, the product should generally be safe to eat if it is handled properly, up until it is clear it has become spoiled. If a food is spoiled, it will have an off odor, flavor, or texture because it has spoilage bacteria that is naturally present in food. You should not eat food that has spoilage characteristics.

How safe is the lunch meat in my refrigerator?

Generally, packaged lunch meats can be kept in your refrigerator for 2 weeks before you open them. After you open them, they can be kept in the refrigerator for 3-5 days. If you are not able to eat them quickly enough, you can freeze them for 1-2 months and thaw as you need them.

I found some food in my freezer, but I am not sure how old it is. Can I use it for a meal?

Food that is kept frozen is considered to be safe indefinitely. However, it may be freezer-burned, or have a different texture and odor. This does not mean it is unsafe—you can cut off freezer burn and heat it to an appropriate temperature.

If the food is raw/uncooked, it is important to remember that it can still harbor bacteria that can make you and your family sick. Make sure to follow the 4 steps to food safety and thaw raw meats in the refrigerator.

References:

- <https://ask.usda.gov/s/>
- <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2011/05/25/cooking-meat-check-new-recommended-temperatures>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>
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