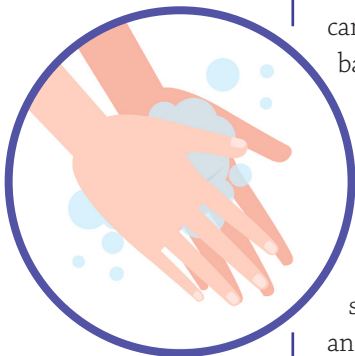




# HOME FOOD SAFETY SAVVY

## Small Actions...Big Impacts

People find little time to pay attention to food safety, but it is important to learn good habits in the kitchen and in food preparation hygiene. Our food travels a long journey before it gets to our kitchen table and we rely on everybody to do their part in keeping our food safe – including people who prepare food at home. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported that 5.7 million or 12 percent of foodborne illnesses each year result from foods prepared in the home. Foodborne illness often comes from unseen bacteria, viruses, parasites, or toxins and the home is a prime stop for germs to grow and spread. The number of bacteria contributing to foodborne illness can grow rapidly. For example, beginning with 200 bacteria on a dish cloth, each bacteria cell can divide every 15 minutes, and within three hours there will be more than 50,000 bacteria on the dish cloth.



Despite the scary rates of foodborne illnesses in home-prepared food, there are some simple steps that Montanans can take to keep their food and families safe. Some of these food safety tips might seem routine. If they are not, start using one or more of these food safety tips at home and share them with others.

1. **Change the dish cloth daily.** Dish towels or cloths are commonly used to clean up around the kitchen: scrub the dishes in the sink, wipe up drippings from raw and cooked meats and clean the stove. In a study of 100 dish cloths from

home kitchens, 45% of the cloths or sponges had bacteria on them related to foodborne illness (Borrusso and Quinlan, 2017). To avoid spreading germs when cleaning food preparation areas, use a clean dish towel or cloth daily; or use a single use paper towel.

2. **Wash hands.** Hand washing is a practice we learn at a young age. It is important to remember how often hands should be washed. The simple answer is all the time. When hand washing, the CDC recommends scrubbing hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds (sing the A-B-Cs as a timer), making sure to wash frequently missed areas in between fingers, fingernails and the back of hands. To reduce the spread of germs, it is important to wash hands after nearly every task in the kitchen, including unpacking groceries, handling raw meats, and taking out the trash. Use hand sanitizer only when there are no other options. Hand sanitizers do not get rid of all types of germs and are not as effective when hands are dirty.
3. **Keep surfaces clean.** When preparing food, it is important to start with a clean kitchen. To clean kitchen surfaces, use soap and water to remove any stuck-on food and a sanitizer to reduce bacteria to a safe level. Always use a clean dish cloth when making a meal to prevent cross-contamination. Wash and sanitize utensils and cutting boards with hot soapy water to reduce unseen germs. When preparing produce, rinse

fruits and vegetables under running water and separate thawing meats from other foods. Never use the same plate or cutting board for both raw and cooked meats, poultry, and seafood.

4. **Store food properly.** Storing food correctly is one way to prevent spoilage and foodborne illness. One big concern with food storage is temperature because germs grow on food between 40°F and 140°F (USDA, 2017). Refrigerate all perishable foods within two hours. To cool down hot foods more quickly, put in shallow containers in the fridge or freezer. Check that the refrigerator is at least 40°F or colder, and the freezer is at 0°F. Label container with the date the food should be thrown out and the name of the food. Most leftovers need to be eaten or frozen within 3-4 days.



5. **Be aware of those at risk.** Is there an elderly family member, young child or someone with a compromised immune system in the household? These individuals are at higher risk for foodborne illnesses. It is important to take extra food safety precautions with these household members because they may not have the antibodies to fight off germs that commonly cause foodborne illnesses.

6. **Check food temperatures.** The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides the research for proper cooking and cooling temperatures to make sure the food we eat is safe from germs. When cooking, use a food thermometer to check the temperature of food, especially meat, poultry, seafood, and leftovers. Clean and sanitize the thermometer between each use. When testing the temperature of food, test in the thickest part of the product, avoiding bones and test the temperature in two or three places. By following these steps and meeting the USDA temperature guidelines, food will be cooked to a safe and proper temperature.

Improving food safety habits can be a big step towards safer and healthier foods. Check out [fightbac.org](http://fightbac.org) for “The Story of Your Dinner” and more information about food safety practices to use at home. The tips shared here are easy and effective ways to make food safer at home. If you are not sure if something is safe, contact the local Montana State University Extension agent to answer food safety questions. *Finally, when in doubt, throw it out!*

### References

Borrusso, P. A., & Quinlan, J. J. (2017). *Prevalence of pathogens and indicator organisms in home kitchens and correlation with unsafe food handling practices and conditions*. Journal of Food Protection, 80(4), 590-597. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/proxybz.lib.montana.edu/10.4315/0362-028X.JFP-16-354>

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United States Department of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service. (2017). Danger Zone (40°F - 140°F). Retrieved from: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/danger-zone>. ■

### COOKING REQUIREMENTS Minimum Internal Temperatures



**Poultry: 165°F (74°C)  
for 15 seconds**



**Whole cuts of meats and roasts: 145°F (63°C)  
for 4 minutes**



**Seafood: 145°F (63°C)  
for 15 seconds**



**Ground meat: 155°F (68°C)  
for 15 seconds**



**Cooked plant foods:  
135°F (63°C)  
for 15 seconds**