

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

Proper hand-washing 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.



How can I keep my food safe?

- To keep your food safe, fresh, and spoilage-free, it is important to make sure you refrigerate perishable food as soon as possible. If you are not going to immediately prepare and eat the food, the general guidelines are to refrigerate the food within 2 hours. You should refrigerate food within 1 hour if the ambient temperature is over 90°F, such as if you have the food outside for an outdoor gathering.
- 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.

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

References:

- <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2011/05/25/cooking-meat-check-new-recommended-temperatures>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html>
- Hand Washing: <https://youtu.be/7tcZwIN-ZGM>



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Keeping Food Safe at Home

We answer your questions about how to make sure the food you and your family prepare at home is safe.



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How long is fresh meat safe?

For fresh or uncooked meat products, for best quality and to prevent food waste due to spoilage it is best to cook or freeze beef, pork, or lamb within 3-5 days of purchase. For fresh chicken, turkey, 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 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 water and change the water every 30 minutes. Once thawed completely, the food must be cooked. Food that is cold-water thawed must be cooked before re-freezing.
- **Microwave thawing.** If you thaw raw meat in the microwave, it must be cooked immediately. Some parts of the food may become too warm, and it can allow bacteria to grow. Cook before re-freezing.

What does that date mean on the food label?

The dates on your food generally relate to quality and not food safety. 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 Used By/Before.** This is not a purchase date. It refers to the best flavor or quality.
- **Sell By.** It is for the store to manage inventory. This is a date that is used by stores, so they know how long to display products for sale.
- **Use By.** This is a recommended date to ensure quality. This does not refer to food safety. 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?

Do not use infant formula beyond the date on the label. 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 spoilage bacteria are naturally present in food. You should not eat food that has spoiled.

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, which can lead to bacterial growth and spoilage, 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 can still harbor bacteria that can make you and your family sick.

Make sure to follow the 4 steps (see below) to food safety and thaw raw meats in the refrigerator. Keep raw meats on the lowest shelf to prevent raw meat juices with bacteria that can make you sick from dripping onto your ready-to-eat (RTE) foods like cheese & fresh produce.



Check your steps:

- **Clean.** Wash your hands & surfaces often, especially before preparing foods.
- **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.
- **Cook.** Cook food to proper temperatures. Use a food thermometer to check the temperature, using these guidelines: <https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/safe-minimum-internal-temperatures>
- **Chill.** Refrigerate perishable food promptly.

Follow the USDA recommended food safety guidelines: <https://www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety>