ARIZONA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
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FOOD SAFETY KNOW-HOW

America's food supply is one of the safest in the world, with farmers, grocery stores, food retailers and manufacturers, preparing and selling food. However, these requirements end when the food goes into your shopping cart and reaches your kitchen.

There are thousands of types of bacteria which are naturally present in our environment. Some are beneficial; however there are certain bacteria which can cause foodborne illnesses. The major difference between food spoiling and food poisoning bacteria is the temperature at which they survive and grow. Bacteria that causes food to spoil, grow at temperatures between 40 degrees F and 140 degrees F. The bacteria makes food look and smell bad so we throw it out.

Most bacteria that cause food poisoning don't grow at refrigerator temperatures. The best temperature for these bacteria is around 100 degrees F. To prevent these bacteria from becoming harmful and making us sick, they must be stopped from multiplying. These bacteria are invisible– that means they can't be seen, smelled or tasted.

When people eat contaminated food caused by food poisoning bacteria, they usually get sick within 4-48 hours. It's not easy to tell if it's the flu or the result of food poisoning. If symptoms are severe such as vomiting, diarrhea, fever or cramps, the person is very young, old, pregnant, or has a chronic illness i.e. heart disease, diabetes or AIDS, call a doctor or go to the hospital immediately.

The majority of food-poisoning bacteria can be controlled by proper cleaning, cooking and refrigeration. Follow these rules constantly when preparing or handling food:

- Wash hands with warm water and soap before preparing foods, after using the restroom, touching your face, sneezing or coughing, and handling raw animal foods.
- Keep everything in your kitchen clean–clean by using hot water and soap or disinfectant.
- Keep hot foods hot (140 degrees F or above).
- Keep cold foods cold (40 degrees or less).
- When reheating cooked food, reheat to 165 degrees F.

For other questions about safe food handling and foodborne illness, contact your County Cooperative Extension office.

References

Food and Drug Administration (FDA), USDA. Foodborne Illness: What consumers need to know. December 2005.

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This information has been reviewed by university faculty.
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