



Safe Food Handling Fact Sheet

Please note the information contained herein is not intended to replace the required training provided in the Food Safety Training online course.

The Invisible Enemy: Bacteria

Despite the fact that Canada's food supply is amongst the safest in the world, sometimes the food we eat can make us sick. Under the right conditions, an invisible enemy called bacteria may be present on foods.

Scientists have learned these important facts about bacteria:

- Bacteria are an integral part of our environment and play many beneficial, but sometimes harmful roles. They are found on all raw agricultural products.
- Harmful bacteria can be transferred from food to people, people to food, or from one food to another.
- Bacteria can grow rapidly at room temperature.
- Growth of harmful bacteria in food may be slowed or stopped by refrigerating or freezing.
- Food borne illness can produce symptoms from mild to very serious. Illness can occur 30 minutes to two weeks after eating food containing harmful bacteria.
- People who are most likely to become sick from food-related illness are infants and young children, senior citizens and people with weakened immune systems.
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Everyone can prevent food borne illness if they learn how to fight bacteria. For more information about fighting bacteria, visit the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education website, at: www.befoodsafe.ca.

Four Simple Steps to Fight Bacteria:

1. **Clean – Wash Hands and Surfaces Often:** Bacteria can spread throughout the kitchen and get on hands, cutting boards, knives and countertops. Frequent cleaning can keep that from happening. Always wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling food.
2. **Separate – Don't Cross-Contaminate:** Cross-contamination is how harmful bacteria spread. Use one cutting board for fresh produce and a separate one for raw meat, poultry and seafood.
3. **Cook – Cook to Safe Temperature:** Even for experienced cooks, the improper heating and preparation of food means bacteria can survive. Use a food thermometer to measure the internal temperature of cooked foods. Make sure that meat, poultry, egg dishes, casseroles and other foods and leftovers are cooked to proper internal temperature (see www.befoodsafe.ca).
4. **Chill – Refrigerate Properly:** Bacteria multiply fastest at temperatures between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F), the "danger zone". Chilling food properly is one of the most effective ways to reduce the risk of food-borne illness. Chill leftovers within 2 hours. Keep the fridge at 4°C (40°F) or below.

Following these simple practices can help you to reduce the risk of food-borne illness.