

Avoid Food Cross-Contamination

What is cross-contamination of food and how does cross contamination spread disease?

- Cross contamination occurs anytime harmful germs, like bacteria (i.e., *Salmonella*, *Escherichia coli*, or *Shigella*), viruses (i.e., Norovirus), toxin-producing organisms (i.e., *Staphylococcus aureus* or *Bacillus cereus*), or parasites (i.e., *Cyclospora*) are transferred from one food to another food in homes, restaurants, and other places where people prepare and eat food such as work or church gatherings.
- Cross contamination can occur through indirect spread of bacteria, virus, toxins, and parasites from raw food to ready-to-eat food by equipment, food handlers, cook utensils, or surfaces (e.g., refrigerator handles, knives, or preparation areas).
- Germs can be spread by hands, cutting boards, utensils, counter tops, and food.

What are the symptoms of foodborne illness?

- People with a foodborne illness may have symptoms such as fever, vomiting, diarrhea (sometimes bloody), nausea, chills, and abdominal cramps.
- People at a higher risk for developing foodborne illness, include pregnant women, young children, older adults, and people with medical conditions.

How do I stop food cross contamination?

- **Clean**



- Wash hands (running water and soap for 20 seconds) before and after going to the bathroom, changing diapers, and handling and feeding pets.
- Wash all surfaces with hot soapy water before and after preparing each food item.
- Use paper towels to clean up kitchen surfaces. If cloth towels are used, select the hot cycle on washing machine to clean.
- Rinse all fresh fruit and vegetables, including those with skins and rinds, under running water.
- Do not wash raw poultry before cooking, because bacteria in raw poultry juices can be spread to other foods, utensils, and surfaces.
- Rub firm-skin fruits and vegetables under running water or scrub with a clean brush.
- Clean the lids of canned foods before opening.

- **Separate**



- Avoid direct contact between raw food and ready-to-eat food during transport, storage, and preparation.



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- Separate raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs from other food in the grocery cart, grocery bag, and refrigerator.
- On the lowest refrigerator shelf, store raw meat to prevent blood from dripping on other foods.
- Use one cutting board for produce and a separate board for raw meat.
- Never place cooked food on surfaces that previously touched raw meat.
- Do not reuse marinades.

- **Cook**



- Cook food to the correct internal temperature to kill harmful germs that cause illness.
- Use a food thermometer to measure the internal temperature in various places.
- Cook ground meat and poultry to the correct temperature, not by color.
- Cook eggs until yolk and white are firm.
- When using a microwave, cover, stir, and rotate food for even cooking.
- Reheat sauces, soups, and gravy to a boil.

- **Chill**



- Refrigerate or freeze foods within 2 hours because cold temperatures slow harmful germ growth.
- Do not overfill the refrigerator. Cold air must circulate to keep food safe.
- Keep refrigerator at 40°F or below.
- Use an appliance thermometer to measure the inside refrigerator temperature.
- Refrigerate or freeze meat, poultry eggs, seafood, and other perishables within 2 hours of cooking or purchasing. Refrigerate within 1 hour if the outside temperature is above 90°F.
- Never thaw food at room temperature. Food must be kept at a safe temperature during thawing.
- Three safe ways to thaw food including: in the refrigerator, in cold water, and in the microwave.
- While marinating, always store food in refrigerator.
- Divide leftovers into shallow containers for quicker cooling in the refrigerator.
- Eat or throw away refrigerated food on a regular basis and pay attention to expiration dates.

Where can I find more information?

- Go to fsis.usda.gov and type in Kitchen Companion in SEARCH box or [fda.gov](https://www.fda.gov) and type in Food Safety in SEARCH box.



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