

How to Avoid “Spring Fever”



erator should be set below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. More alarming was the fact that 32 percent thought the temperature should be set higher than 40 degrees.

Here are some simple tips to remember for safe refrigeration of foods at home:

- Set the temperature below 40 degrees, using a refrigerator thermometer

found in hardware and home-supply stores. Place the thermometer in the center of the middle shelf and check it regularly.

- Keep your refrigerator clean. Immediately wipe up spills with hot, soapy water and rinse.

- Refrigerate or freeze meat and poultry the minute you get home from the store.

- Thaw foods in the refrigerator; under cold, running water; or in a microwave right before cooking. Because of room temperature and the high risk for bacterial contamination, avoid using a counter top for thawing food. Remember, the danger zone is 40 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit.

- Make it a weekly habit to throw out expired foods that you no longer should eat.

- Divide leftovers into small portions and store them in shallow, tightly sealed containers (two inches deep or less). Date leftovers so you know how long they've been in the refrigerator. A good rule to follow is to discard cooked leftovers after four days.

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The cases of foodborne illness you most often hear about are those involving eating establishments. Someone becomes ill after eating an uncooked hamburger, unwashed produce, or bacterial-infected meat or poultry. Officials then inspect the place and levy a fine for violating sanitation and food-safety standards.

According to a national consumer survey, however, the biggest platform of illness may be your home refrigerator, not these outside food sources. If food inspections were given to most residences in the U.S., the number of fines given would be astronomical.

While most consumers are concerned about food safety, few follow basic guidelines for perishable foods, such as using a thermometer. The survey found an overwhelming 91 percent of consumers felt it is important that a refrigerator be set at the right temperature. However, 60 percent didn't know their refrig-

- Keep the refrigerator door closed as much as possible, and don't store perishable foods like milk or eggs in the door. Store eggs in their carton on an inside shelf.

- Remember the two-hour rule for prompt refrigeration. Perishable leftovers from a meal should not stay out of the refrigerator more than two hours. In hot weather (90 degrees Fahrenheit or above), this time is reduced to one hour.

- When in doubt, throw it out!

Foodborne illness affects millions of Americans each year. Flu-like symptoms such as headache and nausea are common; however, a lot of people think they have the flu and really

are suffering from a mild case of food poisoning caused by tiny, living bacterial and viral organisms. Proper food refrigeration is just as important as washing your hands before preparing a meal. Follow these important guidelines, and the only "spring fever" you'll experience will be psychological, not pathological. 

The American Dietetic Association (ADA)/ConAgra program, "Home Food Safety...It's in Your Hands," is an initiative to educate consumers on the importance of home-food safety and provides solutions to easy and safe food handling. For more information, visit www.homefoodsafety.org or call the ADA hotline at (800) 366-1655.

Home Food-Safety Challenge

1. True False

Washing your hands with anti-bacterial soap in warm water is the most effective way to reduce bacteria.

2. True False

The best way to clean sponges are by putting them in a dishwasher or microwave.

3. True False

Refrigerators should be kept below 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

4. True False

Plastic cutting boards are the best to use for cutting meats and other foods.

5. True False

It is not OK to defrost meat on the kitchen counter.

6. True False

Food should not be left out of the refrigerator more than three hours.

7. True False

To remove germs, wash your hands for about 20 seconds.

8. True False

Poultry should have an internal temperature of at least 170 degrees Fahrenheit to be safe to eat.

9. True False

In hot weather (above 90 degrees Fahrenheit), food should not be left out of the refrigerator more than an hour.

10. True False

Raw meat, poultry and seafood can be placed anywhere in the refrigerator where space is available.

Home Food-Safety Challenge Answers

1. False. Any type of soap in warm water is effective in reducing bacteria. No scientific evidence shows that anti-bacterial soaps reduce the incidence of disease more than ordinary soap.

2. False. Regularly wash dishcloths, sponges and towels on the hot cycle of your washing machine. Disinfect sponges in chlorine-bleach solution, and replace them on a frequent basis.

3. True. Keep your refrigerator set below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. The internal temperature is based on the amount of food in storage, how often you open the door, and the temperature of your kitchen. The best way to monitor the inside temperature is with a refrigerator thermometer.

4. False. Plastic, wood, marble, and acrylic are all good materials for cutting boards. The most important reminder is to use two cutting boards: one for raw meats, poultry and seafood, and another for ready-to-eat foods, like breads, fruits and vegetables. Wash thoroughly in hot, soapy water after each use and discard boards with cracks and excessive knife scars.

5. True. Never let food defrost at room temperature on the counter or in warm water. Most foodborne pathogens thrive at room temperature. Defrost food in the refrigerator, or use the microwave oven. Meat thawed in a microwave must be cooked immediately afterward.

6. False. Food should not be out of refrigeration more than two hours because bacteria multiply rapidly in temperatures above 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

7. True. Sing two choruses of “Happy Birthday” while you lather—it takes about 20 seconds. Always wash hands front and back and up to the wrists between fingers and under fingernails. Dry with disposable paper towels or clean linen towels.

8. True. Use a meat thermometer. Remember, the danger zone for bacteria is 40 to 140 degrees Fahrenheit. Meats, poultry, egg dishes, and leftovers must be cooked thoroughly. Hamburger should be cooked to at least 160 degrees Fahrenheit and chicken to at least 170 degrees Fahrenheit. Just because the outside looks done doesn’t mean the inside temperature is high enough to kill bacteria such as salmonella.

9. True. In hot weather (above 90 degrees Fahrenheit), the time is reduced to one hour—a good thing to remember during summer when you’re eating at picnics and other outdoor events.

10. False. Raw meat, poultry and seafood should be placed on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator so juices don’t drip on other foods.

Use a thermometer (similar to the one shown in the inset) inside your refrigerator, and check it regularly to make sure the temperature stays below 40 degrees.

