

Food Thermometers Are Key to Food Safety

Which Ground Beef Patty Is Cooked to a Safe Minimum Internal Temperature?



This IS a safely cooked hamburger, cooked to an internal temperature of 160 °F, even though it's pink inside.



This is NOT a safely cooked hamburger. Even though it's brown inside, it is undercooked. Research has shown that some ground beef patties look done at internal temperatures as low as 135 °F.

For more information, check out the FSIS Technical Information publication titled "Color of Cooked Ground Beef as It Relates to Doneness" (8/98). It's available through the Web:

www.IsItDoneYet.gov

Background

Consumer behavior research shows that cooking by color is just one of the ways consumers typically judge whether or not food is "done." Consumers said they also "eyeball" the food, go by recommended cooking times, and trust their experience and judgement. The only problem is, those methods may be misleading them.

In 1995, a study by Kansas State University indicated that ground beef may turn brown before it's cooked to a safe minimum internal temperature of 160 °F, sufficient to destroy potentially dangerous pathogens.

With that information in hand, the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) commissioned the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to examine the color of ground beef nationwide as it relates to doneness.

The Findings?

- 1 out of every 4 hamburgers turns brown before it's been cooked to a safe internal temperature.
- And yet, only 6 percent of main meal cooks checked hamburgers with a food thermometer, according to a 2002 consumer food safety survey conducted by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and FSIS.

What Does This Research Mean to Today's Consumers?

The only way to know food has been cooked to a safe internal temperature is to use a food thermometer.

The goal of the "Is It Done Yet?" campaign is to increase consumer use of food thermometers. And today's thermometer technologies make checking the temperature of "thin" food—like hamburgers or chicken fillets—a "piece of cake." It only takes a few seconds.

For instance, digital instant-read thermometers need to be inserted only a very short way into food. As a result, consumers can easily check the temperature of thin foods by inserting the thermometer probe into food from the top.

It's not complicated—and it's worth the effort. This is especially true for people who are high-risk for foodborne illness—young children, older adults, pregnant women, and people with weakened immune systems.

For more information on different types of thermometers and their uses, look on the Web at

www.IsItDoneYet.gov

or call the

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline

1-888-MPHotline

1-888-674-6854

TTY: 1-800-256-7072