

Feature Article for daily and community newspapers and other publications.

The Importance of Being Food Safe

By Food Safety Partner (personalize)

Do you know how to keep food safe at home?

The easy lessons of clean, separate, cook, and chill will help you protect your family from foodborne illness and teach them how to be food safe.

Foodborne illness is a serious public health threat and all of us are susceptible. Consider the numbers: Each year, approximately 76 million cases of foodborne illness occur in the United States alone, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Of those cases of foodborne illness, more than 325,000 people are hospitalized and approximately 5,000 people die – that is almost 13 people every day. That is why it is critical that people understand the dangers of foodborne bacteria and learn how to Fight BAC!®

We are all dependent upon food, which means every single American can help to ensure that the food we eat is safe. From farm to table, we all have a role in keeping our food safe.

Farmers and ranchers must be committed to raising only the very best – and safest – food products. Food companies and food processors must continue to be vigilant about ensuring that food is processed in accordance with the stringent Federal standards that are in place to ensure safety. Federal, State, and local government agencies must enforce the food safety laws that are on the books to ensure the food we eat is safe, wholesome, and correctly labeled and packaged.

But the last line of defense against foodborne illness is in our own kitchens. The four basic safe food handling behaviors – clean, separate, cook, and chill – will empower consumers with the knowledge to be food safe.

Clean – Wash hands, utensils, and cutting boards before and after contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs.

Separate – Keep raw meat and poultry apart from foods that won't be cooked. Use different cutting boards for meat, poultry, seafood, and veggies.

Cook – You can't tell it's done by how it looks! Use a food thermometer to be sure meat and poultry have reached a safe minimum internal temperature.

- Poultry should be cooked to 165 °F.
- Ground beef should be cooked to 160 °F.
- Egg dishes should be cooked to 160 °F.
- Steaks and roasts should be cooked to 145 °F.
- Fish should be cooked to 145 °F.

Chill – Chill leftovers and takeout foods within 2 hours and keep the fridge at 40 °F or below to keep bacteria from growing.

So, the next time you are cooking up something in the kitchen – whether you are preparing for a large dinner party, feeding your family, or fixing yourself a snack – remember to keep these four simple messages in mind – clean, separate, cook, and chill –so you and your family will *Be Food Safe*.