

Health

Take precautions with meat/poultry to avoid food poisoning

Did you know that most cases of food poisoning occur from eating food prepared in the home? Each year in Ontario, thousands of people experience symptoms of nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever or cramps and it is not always "just the flu bug"! Often it is caused from another "bug" found in food.

These "bug" or bacteria, can grow and multiply in food and reach numbers in the millions in just a few hours. In large numbers, they can cause illness. Unfortunately, you cannot see, smell or taste them, but you may have heard of a few of them: Salmonella, Campylobacter, E. Coli.

So, how can you protect your family from food poisoning? Following a few basic rules can make all the difference.

Preventing food poisoning starts when you buy food and continues at home as you store, cook and serve the food. When grocery shopping, always pick up meat, poultry and dairy products last and get them home and into the fridge or freezer quickly.

At home, ensure that packages of raw meat are tightly wrapped and put them on plates before refrigerating so that their juices will not drip on other food. For the same reason, always store raw food below cooked or ready to eat food.

Check the temperature of your fridge. It should be at 4 degrees Celsius (40 degrees Fahrenheit) or less to prevent bacteria from multiplying in the food. It is a good idea to keep a thermometer in the fridge on the top shelf at all times. Freeze fresh meat immediately if you cannot use it within two or three days. Check your freezer temperature. It should be at -18 degrees Celsius (0 degrees Fahrenheit).

Thaw meat/poultry in the fridge or under cold running water. Do not thaw these foods on the counter.

Before preparing any food always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water. Dry your hands on a clean cloth or with paper towels.

Germs are present on most raw meat products. Wash your hands, cutting board and knife in hot soapy water and then

sanitize the cutting surfaces and countertops, (e.g. using household bleach). If possible have a separate cutting board for raw meats to prevent cross-contamination from the raw meat juices to other food.

Cook food thoroughly to kill harmful bacteria. Always use

an accurate meat thermometer to check the temperature of the food. Check the thickest part. The minimum internal cooking temperatures for food products are as follows:

- poultry, ground poultry, stuffing 74 C (165 F)
- ground beef, veal or pork 68

- C (151 F)
- other pork products 66 C (151 F)
- seafood and beef 60 C (140 F)

Once cooked, keep food hot until served, never leave out for more than two hours. Refrigerate leftovers quickly. When

reheating food, cook thoroughly to 74 C (165 F). Bring sauces, soups and gravy to a boil. When cooking ahead, divide large portions of food into shallow containers for refrigeration. This allows the food to cool quickly and prevent bacteria from multiplying in the food.

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