



## The DIRT Society Practicing Food Safety

### The Worldwide Crisis:

*Food Safety is a bigger issue than you think.*

The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) estimates that, in a year's time, 3,000 Americans die, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 48,000,000 become ill due to foodborne diseases. In a country where the cost of healthcare and medicine is a growing concern, those numbers should have a transformative effect. Why? Because food safety is simple, and preventing these illnesses should take very little time and effort. Frankly, these are diseases no educated consumer should have... and we should *all* be educated consumers.

This isn't, of course, an isolated health concern. Abroad, foodborne illnesses continue to claim lives and overwhelm healthcare professionals. The World Health Organization acknowledges that, in developing and developed countries alike, foodborne illness is so rampant and difficult to quantify that statistics which track the spread and prevalence are simply not available. They have launched the Initiative to Estimate the Global Burden of Foodborne Diseases in an effort to better understand this very serious international issue.



### Prevention; The Simplest Solution

**And yet, food safety is elementary.** The rules are easy to understand, and adapting to the practice of food safety typically requires only minor changes in how we shop, store, prepare, and consume. Below, some of the most basic precautionary measures have been summarized. These will help you eat well, avoid illness, save your healthcare dollars, and *live another day*.



#### When you shop for food:

- Do not buy food in leaky or damaged packaging.
- Separate meat and fish items from raw produce.
- Check any labeling for warnings, allergens or expiration dates.

#### When you store food:

- **Always know the temperature of your refrigerator and freezer.** The former should rest at 40°F, (4.4°C) and the latter at 0°F (-17.7°C). Buy and maintain a thermometer for this purpose.
- Freeze any potentially risky items that you plan to hold for a considerable length of time. A good, all-encompassing rule would be: Meats and fish you plan to keep without cooking for more than two days should be frozen and dated.

- Organize your refrigerator so that air can circulate properly. Use small containers, do not overcrowd, and ensure that vents are not blocked.
- Clean your refrigerator periodically, and immediately after spills and leaks.
- Cooked leftovers should be consumed within four days.

### When you prepare food:

- **Know the food safety "danger zone." Between 40°F and 140°F (4.4°C and 60°C), foods and contaminated surfaces are supporting rapid bacterial growth.** When cooking, heat foods above 140°F to eliminate a large percentage of harmful foodborne pathogens.
- Play it safe, and thaw ingredients in the refrigerator.
- Prepare foods using clean utensils, on clean surfaces, with clean hands.
- Prevent cross-contamination. Wash utensils between use, paying very close attention to surfaces that have been in contact with raw meat. If you are handling raw ingredients, wash your hands before touching other foods, utensils, kitchen surfaces, etc. Always use warm, soapy water to properly wash your hands throughout the food prep process.
- Do not use canned goods that appear suspect. The contents of jars or cans that are leaking, misshapen or unsealed should be disposed of.
- When preparing meat, follow these internal temperature guidelines by using a clean meat thermometer. **Poultry should be cooked to 165°F (73.9°C). Ground meats should be cooked to 160°F (71.1°C). Most other meats can be consumed after reaching 145°F (62.8°C). Remember: Color is not an indication of proper meat preparation.**



### At mealtimes:

- Once foods have been prepared and set out, they should be properly contained and stored within two hours. Any food left out after two hours should be disposed of.
- Be observant. In the event of an allergic reaction, or if you suspect that a dish has caused food poisoning, you should be able to report what was eaten, when it was eaten, and how it was prepared. This is key in preventing serious outbreaks and in treating illness.

### A note on holidays and warm weather:

- The number of reported foodborne illnesses spikes during warm weather and holidays. Picnics and social mealtimes are often casual affairs, and the rules of safe food handling are too often disregarded. It is extremely important that foods are kept chilled, cooked properly, and disposed of after they have been sitting out for one or two hours.
- Any meats that are cooked outdoors should be prepared and heated to a safe temperature completely on site. Do not transport partially cooked meats; only completely cooked dishes that will be served immediately or raw ingredients properly contained and temperature controlled should be used.

## Who is at risk?

Nobody is immune to food poisoning, though the severity of symptoms is much greater within a few high-risk populations. Elderly, immunocompromised, pregnant and young consumers are all at a far greater risk of becoming seriously ill.

## What if?

If you are experiencing symptoms of food poisoning, consider the following:

- Symptoms rarely follow immediately, and food poisoning can take weeks to become evident. Therefore, it is unwise to assume that the last meal consumed was the pathogen carrier. Consider, instead, which foods you've believed to be suspect. Did anyone else consume the same foods? Have they been ill?
- After a large gathering in which food was shared, it is always best to alert other diners who may have been at risk.
- Food safety concerns should be reported to authorities. This triggers investigations into possible causes, and prevents widespread illnesses. Within the United States, consumers can report dangerous foods to their local health department or to the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline.
- Contact a doctor if you are seriously ill or if symptoms last more than three days. Bloody stools, severe dehydration, or double vision are all symptoms that may require medical attention.



## Food Safety in a Nutshell:

1. Separate potentially dangerous foods.
2. Store all foods properly.
3. Maintain adequate refrigerator and freezer temperatures.
4. Cook meats to recommended internal temperatures.
5. Repeatedly wash surfaces, utensils and hands.
6. Serve quickly, eat quickly.
7. Eat left-overs within four days.
8. Remember: Foods within the temperature danger zone are bacteria breeding grounds. Chill and heat accordingly.