



Top Three Tips for Food Safety

“CHB Bites” is a column designed to keep you in-the-know about the Certified Hereford Beef® (CHB) program. To get involved with CHB on social media, search *Certified Hereford Beef* on Facebook and Pinterest, @certifiedherefordbeef on Instagram and @crtherefordbeef on Twitter.



Holiday cooking and baking is a mainstay, and main courses such as turkey and ham (or better, Certified Hereford Beef® prime rib!) are holiday favorites for many. While these dishes might be the star attraction, proper food safety practices are equally important.

Don't cross contaminate

Thoroughly clean and sanitize any cutting boards, counters or tables that have come in contact with raw meat products before using that surface to prepare something else. This is one of the most common ways to spread germs like *Salmonella* or *E. Coli*. For example, never cut vegetables on the same surface you just touched with a raw turkey unless it has been properly cleaned and sanitized.

Never slice a cooked roast or turkey on the same cutting board where you had raw meat. Cooking helps kill unwanted, illness-causing microorganisms, but if you place an already cooked item onto a dirty, contaminated cutting board, then the cooked product becomes contaminated again.

Diluted bleach is an excellent way to ensure proper sanitation of surfaces and utensils. Wash major food residues off your knives, cutting board or counter before cleaning. Mix one tablespoon of bleach into a gallon of water; stir and pour into a spray bottle. This creates a solution strong enough to sanitize food contact surfaces without being harmful to humans. Make sure to wipe everything down with a clean, dry cloth afterwards.

Cook food properly

Another leading cause of foodborne illness, especially in meat, is insufficient internal temperatures. A meat thermometer is a very simple and inexpensive tool everyone should have in the kitchen to ensure:

- 1) You and your families are safe when consuming meals
- 2) You don't overcook any meats and make them too dry or tough

Intact beef products (roasts and steaks) are safe to consume at 145 F internal, which is a medium degree of doneness. Non-intact products, such as ground beef and tenderized steaks (cube steaks), should always be cooked to 160 F or well done to ensure any dangerous microorganisms are eliminated.

Finally, all poultry products, like turkey and chicken, should always be cooked to 165 F. Always probe your thermometer in the thickest part of the meat to get an accurate temperature reading.

Store food properly

Many of us put in a lot of effort to prepare and cook food safely, but it could all be in vain if you do not store your foods properly in the refrigerator. The general rule we follow is to stay in the “temperature danger zone” of 40 F to 140 F for no more than four hours. Most microorganisms grow fastest in this range of temperatures, so try and minimize time spent in the temperature danger zone.

If you think your food may have spent too long in the temperature danger zone, simply reheat to 165 F internal temperature to kill any harmful germs.

The best way to stay out of the temperature danger zone is to always immediately refrigerate foods once you are finished eating. Don't leave it out too long and always properly reheat before eating leftovers.

The holiday seasons are about spending time with family; do not let food poisoning ruin your good time. So, remember, don't cross contaminate, cook your food and store it properly! If you follow these tips, then you should be set to serve a delicious and safe holiday dinner. **HW**

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