



# From the Food Bank Kitchen

The Food Bank  
of Western Massachusetts

## Food Safety in Your Kitchen

Fragrant home cooking, family conversation, the sight and smell of freshly baked bread coming out of the oven — these are the things that might pop into your mind when you think of your kitchen. What you may not think about is that a kitchen is the ‘germiest’ place in your home. Nearly 2/3 of consumers use their eyes or nose to decide whether to eat a questionable refrigerated food. Unfortunately, that won’t tell you if the food is safe. That just detects the presence of spoilage microorganisms, not necessarily food pathogens. Most of the organisms in food that can make you sick don’t create slime or bad smells. Focusing on food safety can help prevent you and your family from getting sick from food borne illnesses.

### Kitchen Food Safety Hazards

**Sponges/Dishcloths:** Sponges and/or dish cloths can be the dirtiest items in your kitchen. Keeping them clean can also be a challenge. Sanitize your sponge by running it through the dishwasher or microwaving it for 1 minute (make sure the sponge has no metal on it and is fully moistened first). Replace sponges as soon as they show signs of wear. For dish cloths, start each day with a fresh clean one and at the end of the day place used cloths in the laundry hamper.

**Countertops:** These areas are often exposed to raw meats, unwashed produce, unclean hands, and dirty sponges. Keep them clean by using soap and a clean dish cloth/sponge and wiping them, then wipe dry with a paper towel.

**Sinks:** Try to imagine how much stuff goes down a sink drain. Food particles get trapped in the drain and disposal, creating a perfect environment for bacterial growth. Sanitize your sink by cleansing with a bleach solution (mix 1 tablespoon of bleach with 1 gallon of water). Hint: wash your fruits and vegetables in a separate bowl or colander, not directly in the sink. This can lessen the chance of your food being exposed to harmful bacteria.

**Cutting Boards:** Be on the lookout for cutting boards that feel rough, have deep pits, scratches, and/or have residual food pieces even after cleaning. These are bacteria breeding grounds! If your boards look like this, replace them immediately. Pay close attention to cross contamination. After using a cutting board for raw meat/poultry/seafood, **NEVER** use the same board again for ready to eat foods or produce. Thoroughly clean the board between uses.

**Refrigerators and Freezers:** Refrigerators must be kept at 40° F or below and freezers must be kept at 0° F or below. The only accurate way to measure the temperature is by the use of a thermometer designed for the refrigerator/freezer. Clean the inside of your refrigerator at least once a month to remove spills/leaks. See the resource section for more information on other refrigerator food safety concerns.

**Reusable Shopping Bags:** Who knew that these earth friendly bags could cause such problems? Cross contamination occurs when a bag is first used for raw meats, then is used again for produce or ready to eat foods. Also the bags are placed on the ground and produce with dirt can contaminate the bag. Prevent this problem by washing the bags with your other laundry between uses. Store them in a dry, clean place.

*Source: Nutrition Action Health Newsletter November 2011*

### QUIZ: Test Your Food Safety Knowledge

1. True or False: One of the best ways to help stop food borne illness is by practicing frequent hand washing for at least 20 seconds.
2. True or False: Safe ways to defrost meats or other foods is by leaving the item on the counter, defrosting in the microwave or by placing in the refrigerator.
3. True or False: The 5-second rule says if you pick up food just a few seconds after it falls on the floor it is still safe to eat.
4. True or False: You have 4 hours to refrigerate leftovers from a restaurant or from your own cooking.
5. True or False: It is best to wash all meats, poultry and eggs as soon as you get home from the store.
6. True or False: During a power outage as long you keep the door to the refrigerator closed your food will be safe to eat.
7. True or False: It is important to follow the food recalls that the FDA puts out.
8. True or False: The only way to tell if a food is cooked fully is by using a food thermometer.
9. True or False: The Food Danger Zone is 41°F to 140° F.
10. True or False: The best way to tell if a food item has gone bad is the “sniff test”.



**TURN PAGE OVER FOR THE ANSWERS AND MORE FOOD SAFETY INFORMATION**

## Common Food Safety Myths Debunked!

1. **True.** Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water BEFORE eating, preparing foods and AFTER using the bathroom, eating, smoking, drinking, handling raw meat/poultry/fish or produce, coughing or sneezing, or completing household activities such as taking out the trash, or cleaning with chemicals.
2. **False.** The only safe ways to defrost foods are: defrosting in the microwave, placing the item in a covered container on the bottom shelf in the refrigerator, or placing the item in a sealed container and thawing in cold water. For this method, put the frozen package in a watertight plastic bag and submerge it in cold water. Be sure to change the water every 30 minutes. Note: If you thaw this way (or in the microwave), be sure to cook the food immediately afterward. **NEVER** thaw food on the counter, as this will give bacteria a chance to grow and could make you sick.
3. **False.** The idea that if a food falls on the floor and is picked up within 5 seconds is safe to eat is **untrue**. Food comes in contact with bacteria the instant it touches the ground.
4. **False.** You have only **two hours** to refrigerate leftovers from a restaurant or home cooked meal. On very hot days (90°F and above), make sure those leftovers are refrigerated after **one hour**.
5. **False.** According to the [foodsafety.gov](http://foodsafety.gov) website: “Washing raw meat and poultry can actually help bacteria spread because their juices may splash and contaminate your sink and countertops. Washing eggs could break the shell and could contaminate the eggs. All commercial eggs are washed before sale”.
6. **False.** During a power outage your food will keep **cold for about 4 hours** if it is unopened. Unsure about what to do with your food during a power outage? See resources below.
7. **True.** The FDA puts out alerts to keep the public informed of possible food dangers. For more information, see the website [foodsafety.gov](http://foodsafety.gov) or visit the government website [recalls.gov/food.html](http://recalls.gov/food.html).
8. **True.** It is a common myth that one can tell if a food is done by looking at the color of the item. The only way to be 100% sure is to use a meat thermometer. Here is a quick guide for temperature goals:

Food Type	Temperature	Food Type	Temperature
Ground Meats (beef, pork, veal, lamb)	160° F	Poultry	165° F
Beef, veal, lamb		Pork (fresh)	145° F
Medium rare	145° F	Seafood (fin fish)	145° F
Medium	160° F	Egg Dishes	160° F
Well done	170° F	Leftovers/Casseroles	165° F

9. **True.** The Food Danger Zone is a range of temperatures in which germs grow the best, so avoid keeping food in this temperature range for more than 2 hours. Remember: keep your hot foods hot and keep your cold foods cold!
10. **False.** Pathogens do not always have an odor. So a food may smell ok but may not be safe to eat. Need a guide for how long to keep foods? See reference box below for more info.

## Resources

[Homefoodsafety.org](http://Homefoodsafety.org): This site offers videos, colorful handouts, and information on home food safety. A go to site for how to sanitize your refrigerators and freezers and how long to hold on to foods. Also offers a free app that shows cooking temperatures, shelf life of foods, and offers a home food safety quiz.

[foodsafety.gov](http://foodsafety.gov): To find out about food recalls or to sign up for e-mail alerts, go to this site. It also offers fun learning videos and great information on a variety of topics.

[foodbankwma.org/what-we-do/nutrition/nutrition-tips/](http://foodbankwma.org/what-we-do/nutrition/nutrition-tips/) : For information on food safety during a power outage or other health/nutrition topics visit this site.

[Fightbac.org](http://Fightbac.org): If you are working with a school age crowd or need handouts for a general audience this a helpful location.

[Fsis.usda.gov](http://Fsis.usda.gov) for information on food safety in the workplace and at home; questions can also be sent by e-mail to [mpholine.fsis@usda.gov](mailto:mpholine.fsis@usda.gov)

USDA Meat and Poultry hotline 888-674-6854, Monday through Friday year-round.

