

RM 10–NU: Safe Food Guidelines*

Everyone has a responsibility to help keep food fresh and safe by following safety guidelines related to handling, preparing, cooking, serving, and storing food.

Purchasing Food

- Buy only pasteurized milk and government-inspected meat and poultry.
- Check “expiry” and “best before” dates, and purchase food accordingly.
- Do not buy canned goods in tins that are dented, rusted, bulging, or cracked, as contents may be contaminated.
- Do not buy food from unrefrigerated displays that should be in a cooler.
- Do not purchase eggs that are cracked or not refrigerated.
- Pick up cold and hot food last when shopping, so it will have the least amount of time to change temperature before getting it home.
- Keep raw meat products separate from other products in the shopping cart. Place these products in plastic bags at checkout, to prevent juices from leaking or contaminating other foods.
- Do not leave products in the car for long periods of time, as they may spoil.

Storing Food

- Keep the refrigerator at 4°C (40°F) or colder.
- Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared food, and leftovers within two hours. Do not overfill the refrigerator, as cold air needs to circulate.
- Store meat in plastic bags on the lowest shelf of the refrigerator to keep the meat coldest and to prevent potential drips from getting onto other foods.
- Store canned foods in a cool and dry place.
- Store fresh produce in the refrigerator and do not wash it until time of use.
- Store eggs in their carton, inside the refrigerator where it is colder, not in the door.

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* Source: Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives. “Handling Food at Home.” *Consumer Food Safety*. Nov. 2005. <www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/foodsafety/consumer/cfs01s04.html>. Adapted with permission.

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Preparing Food

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food, and after touching raw food (singing *Happy Birthday* twice takes about 20 seconds).
- Wash counters, cutting boards, equipment, and utensils with hot soapy water or a sanitizer before and after they have been in contact with food. A good kitchen sanitizer can be made by mixing 5 mL (1 teaspoon) of bleach and 750 mL (3 cups) of water. Replace daily.
- Make sure cutting boards are in good repair.
- Do not let the juices from raw meat come in contact with other cooked or raw foods. Always place cooked meat on a clean plate rather than reusing the plate that was in contact with the raw meat.
- Thaw foods in the refrigerator (or in the microwave if it is being cooked immediately), NEVER AT ROOM TEMPERATURE.
- Do not refreeze food that has been thawed. The safest thing to do is cook thawed meat or fish before refreezing it.
- Wash fruit and vegetables under running water to remove dirt and residue before using them. Scrub vegetables such as carrots and potatoes. Don't use soap, as it can leave its own residue.
- Use a new spoon every time you taste your cooking. Don't double dip!
- Keep pets out of the kitchen.
- If you have an infectious disease (e.g., flu, cold), avoid handling food. Always cover your mouth with a facial tissue or sleeve if you sneeze, and wash your hands well. If you have an open cut or wound, ensure it is well cleaned and covered with a bandage, as well as a rubber cover (e.g., glove).
- Change dishcloths often. A warm, damp washcloth is a perfect home for bacteria and germs. An alternative is to use paper towels and discard them after each use.

Cooking Food

- Keep food out of the temperature danger zone by ensuring your refrigerator is set at 4°C (40°F) and by keeping hot foods hot, over 60°C (140°F). At temperatures over 60°C (140°F), bacteria are killed. Keep in mind that bacteria grow fastest between 4°C and 60°C (40°F and 140°F).
- Cook ground meat and poultry until it reaches a safe internal temperature (it should not be pink, but the colour alone is not an indicator of a safe temperature). Always use a meat thermometer (internal temperature: 75°C, 167°F). Thoroughly cooking food destroys harmful micro-organisms.
- Use microwave-safe containers when using the microwave, and rotate food for even cooking.

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Serving Food

- Wash hands with soap and water before serving food.
- Do not leave potentially high-risk foods, whether raw or cooked, at room temperature longer than necessary and not longer than two hours.
- Keep hot foods steaming hot, over 60°C (140°F).
- Use designated utensils for each food item.
- Keep batches of food separate.
- Place small amounts of food on the table if serving a buffet.

Storing Leftovers

- Wash hands before and after handling leftovers.
- Refrigerate leftover food immediately or within two hours of preparation.
- Divide hot leftovers into small shallow containers for quick cooling.
- Store leftovers in appropriate storage containers (e.g., cling wrap, freezer bags, air-tight containers).
- Reheat leftovers to a temperature of 75°C (167°F). Bring soups and sauces to a boil.
- Cooked meat (e.g., sandwich meat, burgers) can be refrigerated and safely eaten within three days. Don't keep leftovers more than four days.

Discarding Spoiled Food

- Discard food if you're not sure how long it's been in the fridge. (Note: You can't necessarily tell if a food is contaminated with harmful organisms by looking at it, smelling it, or tasting it.)
- If mould forms on hard cheese, trim off the mould plus 1 inch (2.5 cm) from all sides of the cheese block. Keep the knife clean and put the cheese in a new wrapper. Discard mouldy soft cheese (e.g., feta, brie, Camembert).
- Discard cans that bulge or leak. Do not taste the contents.
- Discard mouldy jams, syrups, nuts, or grains. Mould spreads in these products and can be dangerous.

When in doubt, throw it out.