



University of Nevada
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Food Safety Tips for Nevada Adult/Elderly Caregivers

Stanley T. Omaye, State Food Safety Specialist*
Mary P. Wilson, Area Nutrition Specialist**

The state of Nevada holds the distinction of having one of the fastest growing populations in the nation. In 2005, Nevadans aged 65 and older increased by 32% compared to five years earlier (Nevada State Demographer & Nevada State Department of Taxation, 2005). Also, 5.7% of elders 65 and older lived in group quarters and 66.2% lived in households with others, leaving 28.2% living alone.

Along with pregnant women, infants, young children and those with compromised immune systems, the elderly are at greatest risk for foodborne diseases. For the elderly, increased risk is related to their inability to fight off dangerous bacteria that may invade their bodies through the food they eat. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 76 million people get sick, more than 300,000 are hospitalized and approximately 5,000 Americans die each year from foodborne illnesses. Thus, the adult/elderly caregivers most responsible for the daily food preparations are crucial individuals in this society. In a recent survey performed by University of Nevada Cooperative Extension on adult/elderly caregivers fewer than 71% exhibited risky food preferences and 79% had poor cleanliness behavior.

This publication will help you to learn more about what caregivers should look for during the preparation of food to prevent foodborne illness.

Recognizing Foodborne Illness

Recognizing when harmful bacteria are present in foods can be difficult. Most of the time, you can't see, smell or even taste the harmful bacteria. People often think that their foodborne illness was caused by their last meal. However, there can be a wide range of lag time between eating the food with harmful bacteria and when one becomes ill. In most situations, foodborne illness can occur one to three days from eating the offending food. However, you could become sick as soon as half an hour or as late as one and a half months after eating foods containing harmful bacteria.

Common symptoms of foodborne illness include stomach aches, vomiting and diarrhea, which are similar to other types of illnesses. Often the symptoms can be mistaken as flu-like, with head and body aches. If you suspect foodborne illness, have the client checked by a physician. Foodborne illness can be dangerous and possibly life threatening. The best defense is prevention.

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Food Safety

The following basic rules of food safety will help you prevent foodborne illness for yourself and your clients.

Clean – Bacteria live in the kitchen and can be found on countertops, cutting boards, utensils, and even the surface of foods.

- Before and after handling food, wash your hands with hot soapy water. Be sure you wash your hands after using the bathroom, helping clients in the bathroom or with trips outside. Also, wash your clients' hands or your hands if either of you have been handling pets.
- After preparing each food item, wash your cutting boards, dishes, utensils and countertops with hot soapy water or have separate cutting boards for meats and produce. At least once a day, sanitize your kitchen (washing with a solution of 1 teaspoon of liquid chlorine bleach to 1 gallon of warm water). Discard excessively worn cutting boards. Use paper towels to clean kitchen surfaces. If you use cloth towels, wash them often using the hot cycle in the washing machine.
- Wash fruits and vegetables, including those that are organically grown with cold clean running water. You can scrub fruits and vegetables with a clean scrub brush or with your hands. Dry fruits and vegetables with disposable paper towels. The Food and Drug Administration has not tested the safety or effectiveness of antibacterial soaps or other detergents. Antibacterial soaps can cause hands to crack and dry creating possible bacteria hiding spots. Remove and discard outer green leaves from items like lettuce or cauliflower before washing. Trim the hull or stems from items like strawberries, peppers and tomatoes after washing. Wash produce sold in "open" bags or containers.

Separate – When handling raw meat, poultry, seafood and their juices, be sure to keep them

away from other foods that will be served uncooked to prevent cross contamination.

- Use a separate cutting board for raw meat products
- Wash hands, cutting boards, dishes and utensils with hot soapy water after they have been in contact with raw meats, poultry, seafood, eggs and unwashed fresh produce.
- Always use a clean plate to place cooked food on. Bacteria can linger on plates that contained raw food and contaminate your cooked food.

Cook – To kill harmful bacteria, you must properly cook foods. This means the food is heated for enough time at a high enough temperature to kill harmful bacteria that can cause foodborne illness.

- Use a food thermometer to measure the internal temperature of cooked foods. Check Table 1 for safe cooking temperatures.
- When cooking with a microwave oven, rotate the dish several times to prevent cold spots in food, and use a food thermometer to make sure food has reached a safe internal temperature.
- Reheat leftovers to 165°F and bring sauces, soup and gravy to a boil.

Chill – Bacteria in food can double their number every 20 minutes at room temperature. Refrigeration is your best defense (set at below 40°F). You can safely put hot food inside a refrigerator. A safe rule of thumb is to refrigerate or freeze food leftovers within at least two hours after serving. Divide large amounts of leftovers into shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator. Refrigerators are made to cool down foods. Don't overload the refrigerator. There should be enough space between foods that air can freely circulate around them.

- Safe thawing – Never thaw food at room temperature. See Table 2 for thawing rules.
- Marinate foods in the refrigerator.
- Cold foods should be eaten within 2 hours. If not eaten, refrigerated or frozen within the 2 hours, the food should be discarded.

- Food should not sit out for more than 1 hour in temperatures above 90°F.

Special Food Advice for Adult/Elderly Clients

To reduce risk of foodborne illness, advise adult/elderly clients not to eat:

- Raw oysters, clams, mussels and scallops.
- Raw unpasteurized milk, cheese or fruit juices.
- Soft cheeses such as feta, Brie and Mexican-style cheese.
- Raw poultry, meat, or alfalfa sprouts.

Table 1

Safe Cooking Temperatures - As measured with a food thermometer (from www.fightbac.org)	
Ground Meat & Meat Mixtures	
Beef, Pork, Veal, Lamb	160° F
Turkey, Chicken	165° F
Fresh Beef, Veal Lamb	
Medium Rare	145° F
Medium	160° F
Well Done	170° F
Poultry	
Chicken & Turkey, whole	165° F
Poultry Parts	165° F
Duck & Goose	165° F
Stuffing (cooked alone or in bird)	165° F
Fresh Pork	
Medium	160° F
Well Done	170° F
Ham	
Fresh (raw)	160° F
Pre-cooked (to reheat)	140° F
Eggs & Egg Dishes	
Eggs	Cook until yolk & white are firm
Egg Dishes	160° F
Seafood	
Fin fish	145° F or until opaque & flakes easily with fork
Shrimp, Lobster & Crabs	Flesh pearly & opaque
Clams, Oysters & Mussels	Shells open during cooking
Scallops	Milky white or opaque & firm
Leftovers & Casseroles	165° F

Table 2

Thaw Rules (from www.fightbac.org)
Safely thaw food in the refrigerator. Four to five pounds will take about 24 hours to thaw.
You can thaw food by immersing it in cold water. Change the water every half hour to keep the water cold.
You can thaw food in the microwave oven, but be sure to cook it right away.
Marinate foods in the refrigerator.

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*Department of Nutrition, Mail Stop 142
University of Nevada, Reno 89557
Tel: 775-784-6447
Fax: 775-784-6440
Email: omaye@unr.edu

**Cooperative Extension, Southern Area, 8050
S. Maryland Pkwy, Ste 100, LV, NV 89123
Tel: 702-257-5507
Fax:: 702-222-3100
Email: wilsom@unce.unr.edu