



University of Nevada
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Food Safety Tips for Nevada Child Caregivers

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Along with pregnant women, the elderly and those with compromised immune systems, infants and young children are at great risk for foodborne diseases. This is because infants and children do not have a fully developed immune system. 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 illness. In a recent survey completed by University of Nevada Cooperative Extension, 32% of child caregivers indicated that they prepare food for their clients while experiencing diarrhea.

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

Bacteria are microorganisms and can be the cause of foodborne illness, often referred to as food poisoning. Food poisoning occurs when one eats food that has been contaminated by harmful bacteria (or viruses), or that has come into contact with stools, saliva or vomit containing harmful bacteria.

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 child checked by a physician. Foodborne illness can be dangerous and possibly life threatening. The best defense is prevention.

Food Safety

Following basic rules of food safety will help you prevent foodborne illness for yourself and the children in your care.

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Clean – Bacteria are around the kitchen, on countertops, cutting boards, utensils and even the surface of foods.

- The best way to prevent the spread of bacteria is hand washing. Child caregivers and children should wash their hands several times each day to lower their bacteria content. Use warm, running water and soap, rubbing your hands together for at least 20 seconds and wash all the way up your forearms. Rinse thoroughly under running water and dry with disposable paper towels. Be sure you wash hands after using the bathroom, helping children in the bathroom, changing diapers or trips outside. Also, wash children's hands or your hands if either of you have been handling pets. When water is not available, hand-sanitizing products (gel or disposable wipes) may be substituted, but keep them away from children because most of these products contain alcohol.
- After preparing each food item, wash your cutting boards, dishes, utensils and countertops with hot soapy water. At least once a day, sanitize your kitchen (washing with a freshly-made solution of 1 teaspoon of chlorine bleach to 1 quart of 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 evaluated the safety or effectiveness of antibacterial soaps or other detergents. 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 and seafood, be sure to keep them and their juices away from other foods that will be

served uncooked to prevent cross contamination.

- Use a different 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. Sanitize periodically with diluted liquid bleach (one teaspoon liquid bleach to 1 gallon of warm water).
- 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 that 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 internal temperature of cooked foods. Check Table 1 for proper safe cooking temperatures.
- When cooking with a microwave oven, rotate the dish several times to prevent cold spots in food. Again, using 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 refrigerate or freeze food leftovers within 2 hours after serving. Divide large amounts of leftovers into shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator.

- 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 or refrigerated or frozen for eating at another time.
- Food should not sit out for more than 1 hour in temperatures above 90°F"

Keep Hot Foods Hot and Cold Foods Cold

Foods that are left in the danger zone (higher than 40°F but lower than 140°F) permit bacteria to grow quickly, especially if left longer than 2 hours. In fact, leaving food in the danger zone is one of the major causes of foodborne illness. Since you likely are not able to smell or taste contaminated food, if you are not sure throw it away.

When in doubt, throw it out

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 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.

References:

Partnership for Food Safety Education at: www.fightbac.org.

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