

# A Consumer Guide

## to Safe Handling and Preparation of Ground Meat and Ground Poultry

Released by Janie Burney, Associate Professor, Family and Consumer Sciences

### **COOL IT!**

Ground meat and ground poultry are more perishable than most other foods. In the danger zone between 40 degrees and 140 degrees F, bacteria can multiply rapidly. Since you can't see, smell or taste bacteria, keep the products cold to keep them safe.

### **SAFE STORAGE**

- Set your refrigerator at 40 F or colder and your freezer at 0 F or colder.
- Keep uncooked ground meat and ground poultry in the refrigerator; cook or freeze within 1 to 2 days.
- Use or freeze cooked meat and poultry stored in the refrigerator within 3 to 4 days.
- For best quality, store frozen raw ground meats no longer than 3 to 4 months; cooked meats, 2 to 3 months.

### **CLEAN IT!**

Keep EVERYTHING clean – hands, utensils, counters, cutting boards and sinks. That way, your food will stay as safe as possible.

- Always wash hands thoroughly in hot, soapy water before preparing foods and after handling raw meat.
- Don't let raw meat or poultry juices touch ready-to-eat foods either in the

refrigerator or during preparation.

- Don't put cooked foods on the same plate that held raw meat or poultry.
- Wash utensils that have touched raw meat with hot, soapy water before using them for cooked meats.
- Wash counters, cutting boards and other surfaces raw meats have touched. And don't forget to keep the inside of your refrigerator clean.

### **COOK IT!**

Cooking kills harmful bacteria. Be sure ground meat and ground poultry are cooked thoroughly.

### **COOK IT EVENLY**

- During broiling, grilling or cooking on the stove, turn meats over at least once.
- When baking, set oven no lower than 325 F.
- If microwaving, cover meats. Midway through cooking, turn patties over and rotate the dish; rotate a meatloaf; and stir ground meats once or twice. Let microwaved meats stand to complete cooking process.
- After cooking, refrigerate leftovers immediately. Separate into small portions for fast cooling.
- To reheat all leftovers, cover and heat to 165 F or until hot and steaming throughout.

### **SAFE HANDLING**

Choose ground meat packages that are cold and tightly wrapped. The meat surface exposed to air will be red; the interior of fresh meat will be dark.

Put refrigerated and frozen foods in your grocery cart last and make the grocery store your last stop before home.

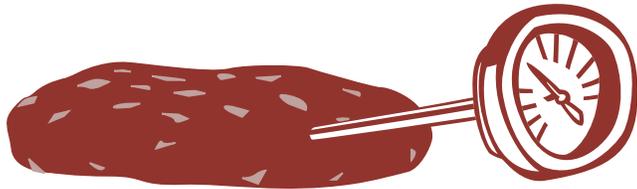
Pack perishables in an ice chest if it will take you more than an hour to get home.

Place ground meat and ground poultry in the refrigerator or freeze immediately.

Defrost frozen ground meats in the refrigerator — never at room temperature. If microwave defrosting, cook immediately.

# COOK IT SAFELY

Ground meat patties and loaves are safe when they reach 160 F in the center; ground poultry patties and loaves, 165 F. Do not use color to determine whether ground meat is safe to eat. Use a meat thermometer.



For information about the safe handling and preparation of ground meat and ground poultry, call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline toll-free at: 1-800-535-4555, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday, or contact your local Agricultural Extension Service office.

Bacteria are part of our environment. Where there is food there may be bacteria. Proper food handling and cooking is the best way to prevent food borne illness. Generally most at risk for developing food borne illness are children, the elderly, and those who have chronic illnesses or compromised immune systems.

## CONSUMER GUIDELINES

### – Cold Storage Times – Ground Meat and Ground Poultry *Refrigerator (40 F or below)*

Product	Days
Uncooked ground meat and ground poultry (bulk or patties)	1 to 2
Cooked ground meat and ground poultry (hamburgers, meat loaf and dishes containing ground meats)	3 to 4

### *Freezer (0 F or below)*

Product	Months
Uncooked ground meat and ground poultry (bulk or patties)	3 to 4
Cooked ground meat and ground poultry (hamburgers, meat loaf and dishes containing ground meats)	2 to 3

### – Internal Temperatures – for Safe Cooking

Product	Temperature
Uncooked ground meat	160 F
Uncooked ground poultry	165 F
All cooked leftovers, reheated	165°F

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