



# Expectant Mothers and Food-borne Illness



## The Special Concern

Pregnant women are a high risk group for food-borne illness. Expectant mothers and individuals who prepare foods for them should be careful in following safe food handling practices. Illnesses that affect a pregnant woman can also affect their unborn child whose immune system is too immature to fight back.

## Advice for Expectant Mothers

- **NEVER** eat raw meat, such as steak tartare (a raw hamburger dish), poultry, or seafood (especially never eat raw oysters or clams).
- **DO NOT EAT** raw or undercooked eggs which are used in Caesar salad, mousse, some custards, home made ice cream, and mayonnaise.
- **DO NOT DRINK** raw or unpasteurized milk or eat foods that contain raw milk.
- **DO NOT EAT** soft cheeses such as feta, Brie, Camembert, blue cheese and Mexican Style soft white types such as Queso Blanco and Queso Fresco.
- **AVOID** food from deli counters. Reheat luncheon meat and hot dogs (160° F).
- **COOK** food thoroughly as discussed below.
- **REFRIGERATE** perishable foods promptly.

## Cook Thoroughly

Use a thermometer to be sure food reaches 160° F. Color is not reliable when determining doneness in meat. Poultry should reach 180° F and breasts 170° F. Stuffing cooked inside poultry, should be cooked to 165° F. Eggs should be cooked until both white and yolk are solid. Use thermistor thermometers to determine temperature because they give a fast reading, they can measure temperatures in thin foods (such as hamburgers), and they have a digital face which is easy to read.

## Safe Food Handling

- **SHOPPING.** Don't buy cans or glass jars with dents, cracks or bulging lids. This can be a sign the food contains harmful microorganisms. Choose perishable foods last before checkout at the grocery store. Place raw meat, poultry, fish, and seafood in plastic bags so that juices do not contaminate other foods.
- **FOOD STORAGE.** Go straight home and refrigerate or freeze the food immediately. If the trip home takes more than 1 hour, put foods in a cooler. Use a thermometer to be sure the refrigerator is 40° F and freezer is 0° F. Store canned goods in a cool, dry place and use within a year.
- **THAWING.** Thawing food on the counter is NOT recommended. Defrost food in the refrigerator. It is also safe to defrost food under cold running water (or change water every 30 minutes) or in the microwave just before cooking.
- **FOOD PREPARATION.** Keep work areas clean. Wash hands, utensils, and cutting boards with warm, soapy water before and after preparing food or handling raw animal products like meat, poultry, or eggs. Wooden and plastic cutting boards can be sanitized with a bleach solution (use 1 teaspoon of bleach in 1 quart of water).

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[ag.arizona.edu/pubs/health/az1064.pdf](http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/health/az1064.pdf)

- **SERVING FOOD. NEVER** leave food out at room temperature for more than two hours. Refrigerate leftover food promptly. Divide food into shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator. For buffets keep hot food hot (at 140° F or above and cold food cold (at 40° F or below). Keep everything clean.

## References

FSIS/USDA. June 1997. Expectant Mothers and Food-borne Illness. <http://www.usda.gov/fsis>

FSIS/USDA. October 1997. Kitchen Thermometers

### ***Listeria monocytogenes***

These food-borne bacteria can cause miscarriage and illness in newborns. Listeria has been found in unpasteurized milk, soft cheeses, hot dogs, lunch meats, and sandwich spreads. Keep your refrigerator set at 40° F or less. To control Listeria, refrigerate any food marked "keep refrigerated" immediately. Don't consume foods past their "use-by-dates." Do not keep unopened lunch meat or sandwich spreads, that do not contain a use-by-date, more than two weeks from purchase. And, use or throw away opened packages of lunch meat within 3 to 5 days.