Handling Food Safely at Home

Directions: Circle YES or NO to answer these questions.

1. Is it safe to leave foods such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs and dairy foods at room temperature for longer than two hours?  YES  NO

2. To prevent cross-contamination, should you wash cutting boards with hot soapy water followed by hot rinse water between cutting raw meat, poultry or seafood and cutting other foods? YES  NO

3. Should you thaw meat, poultry and seafood on the kitchen counter? YES  NO

4. Should you divide large amounts of leftovers into small, shallow containers for quick cooling in the refrigerator? YES  NO

5. Can you always tell by the color of cooked meat and poultry whether it's safe to eat? YES  NO

6. Does handwashing help prevent food-borne illness? YES  NO

Answers:

1. NO. Protein foods -- such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs and dairy foods -- should not be at room temperature for more than two hours. Just one bacterium can grow to over 2 million bacteria in seven hours!

2. YES. After cutting meat, poultry or seafood, wash the cutting board with hot soapy water followed by hot rinse water before cutting other foods. Or, buy several cutting boards to use for different foods and then wash them all in the dishwasher and dry on heat-dry rather than air-dry.

3. NO. Do not thaw meat, poultry or seafood on the kitchen counter. Thaw them overnight in the refrigerator. Place package on a plate on a lower refrigerator shelf. This stops any juices from dripping on other foods and spreading bacteria. If you thaw food in the microwave, cook it right away. Unlike food thawed in a refrigerator, microwave-thawed foods reach temperatures that encourage bacterial growth.

4. YES. Put leftovers in shallow pans so they cool faster. Limit depth of food to about two inches, especially for thicker foods such as stews, hot puddings and layers of meat slices. For greatest safety and quality, eat leftovers in one or two days. Freeze foods for longer storage.

Put leftovers in the refrigerator or freezer promptly after eating. If food is left at room temperature for over two hours, bacteria can grow to harmful levels and the food may no longer be safe. Loosely cover leftovers to allow heat to escape and to protect from accidental contamination during cooling. If you stir refrigerated food to help it cool, use a clean spoon each time. Cover tightly when cooled. Your refrigerator should be set at no higher than 40 degrees F and your freezer no higher than 0 degrees F.

5. NO. Using a food thermometer helps assure meat and poultry are cooked long enough to be safe and helps avoid overcooking that can cause dryness and loss of flavor.

6. YES. Handwashing is considered the single most effective way to help prevent the spread of diseases and can definitely help protect against food-borne illness. Wash your hands with warm soapy water for about 20 seconds before and after handling food and after playing with pets, using the bathroom and changing diapers.