



Fact Sheet

FOOD SAFETY FACTS FOR LEFTOVERS

What is foodborne illness?

Food contaminated by bacteria, viruses and parasites can make you sick. Many people have had foodborne illness and not even known it. It's sometimes called food poisoning, and it can feel like the flu. Symptoms may include the following:

- stomach cramps
- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- fever

Symptoms can start soon after eating contaminated food, but they can hit up to a month or more later. For some people, especially young children, the elderly, pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems, foodborne illness can be very dangerous.

Health Canada estimates that there are as many as 13 million cases of foodborne illness in Canada every year. Most cases of foodborne illness can be prevented by using safe food handling practices and using a food thermometer to check that your food is cooked to a safe internal temperature!

Storing leftovers

It's always important to keep foods out of the danger zone, which is between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F) to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria. To do this, just keep hot foods hot, at least 60°C (140°F) and keep cold foods cold at 4°C (40°F) or lower.

- Food should not be left in the temperature danger zone for more than two hours. Chill and store leftovers properly within 2 hours of serving.
- Discard leftovers if the food has been sitting at room temperature for more than 2 hours.
- Before and after handling leftovers, wash your hands and sanitize all utensils, dishes and work surfaces with a mild bleach solution (5 ml/1 tsp. bleach per 750 ml/3 cups water).
- Never remove a large pot of food (such as soup, stew, or pasta sauce) from the stove and place it directly in the refrigerator. Large masses of food can take hours or days to chill properly. A slow cooling process provides an ideal environment for the growth of harmful bacteria.

- Refrigerate all leftovers promptly in uncovered, shallow containers so they cool quickly. Refrigerate once steaming stops and leave the lid or wrap loosely until the food is cooled to refrigeration temperature. Avoid overstocking the refrigerator to allow cool air to circulate freely.
- Very hot items can be cooled at room temperature until they stop steaming, prior to being refrigerated. Frequent stirring accelerates the cooling at this stage. Food will cool faster in an uncovered, shallow container.
- Always put leftovers in clean containers and never mix them with fresh food.
- An effective way to cool and store hot leftovers is to lay them flat in zipper-type plastic bags. Although the bags must be closed securely, food cools quickly due to the greater surface area exposed to the refrigerated air.
- Do not overcrowd your refrigerator. Leave airspace around containers to allow circulation of cold air. This will help ensure rapid, even cooling.
- Eat leftovers within four days for best quality or freeze for later use. Date leftovers to help identify the contents and to ensure that they are not stored too long.

Reheating leftovers

- Reheat solid leftovers to at least 74°C (165°F).
- Bring gravies, soups and sauces to a full, rolling boil and stir during the process.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions when reheating commercially prepared foods in a microwave.
- Discard uneaten leftovers after they have been reheated.

***NEVER use your nose, eyes or taste buds to judge the safety of food.
You cannot tell if a food may cause foodborne illness by its look, smell or taste.
And remember: "If in doubt, throw it out!"***

Safeguarding Canada's Food Supply

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is the Government of Canada's science-based regulator for animal health, plant protection and, in partnership with Health Canada, food safety.

For more information on food safety, visit the CFIA website at www.inspection.gc.ca. You can also find food safety information on the Health Canada and Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education websites respectively at www.hc-sc.gc.ca and www.canfightback.org.