

NUTRIGRAM

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Why Food Safety Is Important

As you may have heard, there have been recent news reports about the outbreak of the E. coli bacteria in spinach, and it caused some people to get very sick; a few even died. Supermarkets and grocery stores pulled spinach from their shelves and restaurants stopped serving it. You also probably noticed that spinach was no longer served in your dining hall.

What is foodborne illness?

The recent spinach scare heightened public awareness of foodborne illness—sickness caused by consuming foods or beverages contaminated by bacteria, viruses or parasites. Foodborne illness typically results in abdominal cramps, diarrhea and fever. While many symptoms are mild, foodborne illness can lead to severe medical complications and is even fatal if left untreated.

How can you prevent foodborne illness? Food Safety!

What is Food Safety? Most cases of food-related illness can be prevented if everyone who handles and prepares food learns how to do so properly. Chefs and cooks go through special training to make sure they know how to handle food safely to prevent illness. To make sure you are taking the same precautions, read through these tips on food safety.

- ▶ **CLEAN** - Wash hands, utensils and surfaces in hot soapy water before and after food preparation, and especially after preparing meat, poultry, eggs or seafood to protect against bacteria. Use a disinfectant or bleach diluted in water to clean surfaces like counters and tabletops. Antibacterial hand soap can provide some added protection. Replace sponges often.
- ▶ **SEPARATE** - Keep raw meat, poultry, eggs and seafood and their juices away from ready-to-eat foods in and out of the refrigerator; never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry, eggs or seafood. Use two cutting boards—one for meat/poultry/fish and one for produce.
- ▶ **COOK** - Cook food to the proper internal temperature (this varies for different cuts and types of meat and poultry) and check for doneness with a food thermometer. Cook eggs until both the yolk and white are firm.
- ▶ **CHILL** - Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared food and leftovers within two hours and make sure the refrigerator is set at no higher than 40°F and the freezer at 0°. Defrost meat/poultry in the refrigerator to prevent bacterial growth.

Prepared by Susan Cooper, Dietetic Intern



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Jennifer M. Ignacio, MS, RD, CDN
Nutrition Specialist
www.eatlearnlive.com

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