

Kitchen and Food Safety

Carry Out Meal Safety



When it comes to food safety with takeout or grab-and-go meals, focus on three steps to keeping food safe: Clean, Cook, and Chill.

Clean

- Wash hands with soap and water before handling food. Rinse fresh fruits and vegetables that come with the meal.

Cook

- Keep hot foods hot. If a meal is received hot, eat it right away or keep it hot at 140 F or above until you are ready to eat it. Always use a food thermometer to make sure the food is at a safe temperature.
- Two-Hour Rule: Cooked food should not sit at room temperature for more than two hours. It only takes two hours for harmful bacteria to multiply to a quantity that could cause foodborne illnesses.

How to safely keep “hot food hot” at home:

- Move food from takeout containers into a skillet, pot, or saucepan, and keep food hot on the stovetop.
- Use the oven. Preheat the oven and place food on an oven-safe pan or dish. Cover with aluminum foil to prevent food from drying out.
- Place cooked food in a preheated slow cooker to keep hot. Never reheat food in a cold slow cooker.

Reheating

If the meal will not be eaten right away, divide it into smaller portions and store it in the refrigerator. Use shallow food-safe containers no more than four inches deep. Use a food thermometer to reheat food to 165 F, no matter the food or method.

- Microwave: cover and rotate food so it is cooked evenly.
- When reheating gravies, sauces, and soups, bring to a boil.
- Store leftovers in the refrigerator for 3 to 4 days.

Can I reheat in every kitchen appliance?

- Safe for reheating: oven no lower than 325 F, stove-top, microwave oven
- Not safe for reheating: slow cooker, chafing dish

Chill

If a meal is received cold, it should be kept at 40 F or below.

How to safely keep “cold food cold” once home:

- Keep refrigerator set at 40 F or below.
- Store items immediately in the refrigerator until use. If a fridge isn't available, store cold food in small portions surrounded by ice or ice packs.
- Check food temperatures using a food thermometer to ensure food is staying at 40 F or below.



Food Safety Tips for Takeout Containers

- Take food out of containers or bags using clean silverware or tongs, and place it on a clean plate, bowl, or in storage containers before eating.
- Throw out containers and bags immediately.
- Clean and sanitize all surfaces the packaging came into contact with. Learn how to make your own sanitizer at go.illinois.edu/Bleach.
- Wash hands with soap and water before eating.

Call Your Local Office

Contact your local Illinois Extension office with your food safety questions: go.illinois.edu/FindILExtension.

References

- [Safe Handling of Take-Out Foods](#), USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service
- [Tips for Meal Kit and Food Delivery Safety](#), Food Safety.gov

Temperatures to Remember

- 40 F: Refrigerator and storage temperature for cold food and leftovers
- 140 F: Keeping hot food hot
- 165 F: Temperature for reheating all food

Foods to Store in the Refrigerator

- Raw or cooked meat, poultry, and fish, including deli meat, egg, and tuna salad
- Dairy products, such as cottage cheese, sour cream, yogurt, and milk
- Fresh, peeled, and/or cut fruits and vegetables
- Cooked vegetables, pasta, and rice

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