

Safely Receiving, Storing, and Reheating Carryout Meals



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.

Food Safety Tips for Takeout Containers

- Take food out of containers or bags using clean silverware or tongs, and place 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 <https://go.illinois.edu/BleachSanitizer>
- Wash hands with soap and water before eating.

Clean

- Wash hands with soap and water. Additionally, wash any surfaces that come in contact with food or what the food was picked up or delivered in.
- Ask for contactless delivery. This can prevent transferring harmful germs from person to person.
- 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 sauces pan, and keep food hot on the stovetop.
- Use the oven. Preheat 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.



Temperatures to Remember

- 40°F: Refrigerator temperature and storage temp. 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 (this includes 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

Reheating

If the meal will not be eaten right away, divide it into smaller portions and store 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 3 to 4 days.

Can I reheat in every kitchen appliance?

- **Safe for reheating:** oven (no lower than 325 degrees 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 a temperature of 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.

Learn More
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Sources

- “Takeout and Delivered Foods.” Safe Handling of Take-Out Foods, USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, 15 June 2013, www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling/safe-handling-of-take-out-foods/ct_index.
- “Tips for Meal Kit and Food Delivery Safety.” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 26 Mar. 2019, www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/communication/food-safety-meal-kits.html.