



USDA Photo

Food Safety Information

Washing Food: Does It Promote Food Safety?

Historically, we equate washing to cleanliness. We wash clothes, linens, cars, dishes, and ourselves. So, it is logical that many people believe meat and poultry can be made cleaner and safer by washing it. Is this true? Does washing meat, poultry, eggs, fruits, and vegetables make them safer to eat?

Cross-Contamination

Washing raw poultry, beef, pork, lamb, or veal before cooking it is not recommended. Bacteria in raw meat and poultry juices can be spread to other foods, utensils, and surfaces. We call this cross-contamination.

Hand washing after handling raw meat or poultry or its packaging is a necessity because anything you touch afterwards could become contaminated. In other words, you could become ill by picking up a piece of fruit and eating it after handling raw meat or poultry. Practice good hand washing before and after handling raw foods as well as when using the bathroom, changing diapers, tending to a sick person, blowing your nose, sneezing and coughing, and after petting animals.

It is important to prevent cross-contamination from raw meat or poultry juices by washing counter tops and sinks with hot, soapy water. If desired, you may

sanitize with a solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach per gallon of water.

Packaging materials from raw meat or poultry also can cause cross-contamination. Never reuse them with other food items. These and other disposable packaging materials, such as foam meat trays, egg cartons, or plastic wraps, should be discarded.

Washing or Soaking Meat and Poultry

Washing raw poultry, beef, pork, lamb, or veal before cooking it is not recommended. Some consumers think they are removing bacteria from the meat and making it safe. For safety, use a food thermometer to be sure the food has reached a safe minimum internal temperature. Beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts, and chops can be cooked to 145 °F. All cuts of pork should reach 160 °F. All poultry should reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F.

Callers to the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline sometimes ask about soaking poultry in salt water. This is a personal preference and serves no purpose for food safety. If you choose to do this, however, preventing cross-contamination when soaking and removing the poultry from the water is essential.

Sometimes consumers wash or soak country ham, bacon, or salt pork because they think it reduces the sodium or salt enough to allow these products to be eaten on a sodium-restricted diet. However, very little salt is removed by washing, rinsing, or soaking a meat product and is not recommended.

Safe Handling Instructions

This product was prepared from inspected and passed meat and/or poultry. Some food products may contain bacteria that could cause illness if the product is mishandled or cooked improperly. For your protection, follow these safe handling instructions.

-  Keep refrigerated or frozen. Thaw in refrigerator or microwave.
-  Keep raw meat and poultry separate from other foods. Wash working surfaces (including cutting boards), utensils, and hands after touching raw meat or poultry.
-  Cook thoroughly.
-  Keep hot foods hot. Refrigerate leftovers immediately or discard.

Washing Eggs

Do not wash eggs before storing or using them. Washing is a routine part of commercial egg processing and the eggs do not need to be washed again. Federal regulations outline procedures and cleansers that may be used. "Bloom", the natural coating on just-laid eggs that helps prevent bacteria from permeating the shell, is removed by the washing process and is replaced by a light coating of edible mineral oil which restores protection. Extra handling of the eggs, such as washing, could increase the risk of cross-contamination, especially if the shell becomes cracked.

Washing Produce

Before eating or preparing, wash fresh produce under cold running tap water to remove any lingering dirt. This reduces bacteria that may be present. If there is a firm surface, such as on apples or potatoes, the surface can be scrubbed with a brush. Consumers should not wash fruits and vegetables with detergent or soap. These products are not approved or labeled by the Food and Drug Administration for use on foods. You could ingest residues from soap or detergent absorbed on the produce.

When preparing fruits and vegetables, cut away any damaged or bruised areas because bacteria that cause illness can thrive in those places. Immediately refrigerate any fresh-cut items such as salad or fruit for best quality and food safety.

Food Safety Questions?

Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline

If you have a question about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at **1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)**; TTY: 1-800-256-7072.



The Hotline is open year-round Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day. Check out the FSIS Web site at **www.fsis.usda.gov**.

Send E-mail questions to **MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov**.

Ask Karen!

FSIS' automated response system can provide food safety information 24/7.



www.fsis.usda.gov