

Extension Update

From: Sarah Purcell, Extension Educator

Phone: 402-269-2301

Release Date: Immediate

Seven Ways to Prevent Foodborne Illness at the Grocery Store

Foodborne illness can be prevented not only in the home where food is cooked, but at the grocery store where food is bought.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has seven tips for preventing foodborne illness while shopping for food:

1. Check for cleanliness. Buying from a retailer who follows proper food handling practices helps ensure food is safe. Check the general impression of the facility to see if the store looks and smells clean.

2. Keep certain foods separated. Separate raw meat, poultry, and seafood from other foods in the grocery shopping cart.

Place these foods in plastic bags to prevent their juices from dripping on other foods. It's also best to separate these foods from other foods at checkout and in grocery bags. Be sure to separate food from cleaning supplies you are also purchasing at the store.

3. Inspect cans and jars. Don't buy food in bulging cans, dented cans, cracked jars, or those with loose or bulging lids. A bulging can may mean the food was under-processed and is contaminated.

A dented can, especially at a seam, may cause an opening in the seam, allowing contamination. This is the same as a crack in a jar. A loose lid means the vacuum has been lost and the product may be contaminated.

4. Inspect frozen food packaging. Don't buy frozen food if the package is damaged. Packages should not be open, torn, or crushed on the edges. Avoid packages above the frost line in the store's freezer. If the package cover is transparent, look for signs of frost or ice crystals. Frost and large ice crystals could mean that food in the package had either been stored for a long time or thawed and frozen again. In such cases, pick another package.

5. Select frozen foods and perishables last. It's important to keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot.

6. Choose fresh eggs carefully. Open the carton and make sure the eggs are clean and crack free. Buy only refrigerated eggs and follow the "Safe Handling Instructions" on the egg carton.

7. Be mindful of time and temperature. It's important to refrigerate perishable products as soon as possible after shopping.

Food safety experts stress the two hour rule. Because harmful bacteria can multiply in the danger zone, between 40 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit, perishable foods should not be left at room temperature longer than two hours.

Modify that rule to one hour when temperatures are above 90 degrees Fahrenheit, as they often are in cars that have been parked in the sun.

If it will take more than an hour to get groceries home, use an ice chest to keep frozen and perishable foods cold. Also, when the weather is warm and the car's air conditioner is being used, keep groceries in the passenger compartment, not the trunk.

#

Sarah Purcell is a Nebraska Extension Educator for Otoe County and Southeast Nebraska. She can be reached as 402-269-2301 or via email at spurcell2@unl.edu.