

**Extension Column – April 24, 2020**  
**Nebraska Extension in Buffalo County**  
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**Keeping the Refrigerator Clean**

One very important step in keeping food safe is keeping the refrigerator clean.

Wipe up refrigerator spills immediately with warm, soapy water, then rinse. Wipe down handles daily to remove bacteria and food particles.

Make it a habit to check perishable foods weekly. A general rule of thumb for refrigerator storage for cooked leftovers is 4 days; raw poultry and ground meats, 1 to 2 days. Refer to the food storage chart at [www.food.unl.edu](http://www.food.unl.edu) for more information. Remember, “when in doubt, throw it out.”

When doing a thorough cleaning of the refrigerator, empty the refrigerator freezer completely of food, shelves and drawers. Put the food in a cooler to keep it cold. Check the food and throw out old leftovers and expired foods.

Wash the shelves and drawers in warm water and dishwashing soap. Rinse in warm water, then sanitize with a chlorine bleach solution (1 tablespoon unscented liquid bleach per gallon of water, 1 teaspoon liquid unscented bleach per quart of water). Let air dry or dry with single use paper towels. Tip: wait until shelves and drawers are room temperature before cleaning in water. A sudden change in temperature can cause some items to crack.

Wash the interior surfaces of the refrigerator freezer, including gaskets, with warm water and dishwashing soap, then rinse. Wipe dry with single use paper towels. Baking soda and warm water is a good choice for cleaning if odors exist.

Replace the shelves and drawers in the refrigerator freezer. Make sure food containers and bottles are clean before replacing in the refrigerator.

To keep the refrigerator smelling fresh and help eliminate odors, place an opened box of baking soda on a shelf.

Clean the exterior with a soft cloth, and warm water and dishwashing soap or cleansers and polishes that are made for appliance use. Dry with single use paper towels. The front grill should be kept free of dust and lint to permit free air flow to the condenser.

Several times a year the condenser coil should be cleaned with a brush or vacuum cleaner to remove dirt, lint or other accumulations. Unplug the refrigerator before cleaning the condenser coil.

For more food safety information contact Nebraska Extension in Buffalo County, 1400 East 34<sup>th</sup> Street, Kearney 68847 or call (308) 236-1235.