

EXTENSION UPDATE

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Food Safety Myths to Dispel

It seems like no matter how much correct information is spread about food safety, incorrect myths still manage to infiltrate homes and wreak havoc as families cook, eat, and store food. Following are four myths that seem to particularly plague consumers and the correct information on what should occur.

First, when sanitizing countertops with bleach and water, using more bleach does not mean more bacteria will be killed. In fact, using too much bleach can be dangerous because it could remain on surfaces or end up on food. Bleach is not safe to consume.

The recommended ratio for sanitizing solution is 1 tablespoon of unscented liquid bleach per gallon of water. Wash the countertops with the solution, allow it to sit for a few minutes and then let it air dry or pat the area with clean, dry paper towels. Any leftover solution should be covered and stored for up to one week. After that, the bleach will lose its effectiveness.

Second, produce does need to be washed, even if it is peeled. Fresh fruits and vegetables should be placed under running tap water just before eating, cutting, or cooking. Harmful bacteria may be on the outside of the produce, and could be transferred to the part that is eaten if the produce is not washed before being peeled or cut.

Wash delicate produce, like grapes or lettuce, under cool, running water and then blot them dry with a clean cloth towel or paper towel. Rub firm-skin produce under running tap water or scrub them with a clean produce brush. Never use detergent or bleach to wash fruits or vegetables.

Third, the standing time for microwaveable foods is not optional. Standing time is an important part of the cooking process because it makes sure food reaches a safe internal temperature. Letting food stand allows the center of the dish to finish cooking without overcooking the outer edges of the dish that cook faster.

When microwave cooking, always read and follow package instructions, know the microwave's wattage, and use a food thermometer to ensure the food has reached a safe internal temperature.

Finally, leftovers are safe to eat until they smell bad, right? Wrong. Of course, foods that smell bad and have little green things growing on them should be thrown out. However, most of the types of bacteria that cause illness do not change the taste, smell, or appearance of food.

Because of this, it is important to freeze or toss refrigerated leftovers within three to four days. If leftovers have been setting in the refrigerator for an unknown amount of time, don't take the risk – when in doubt, throw it out!

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