

Flu Bug or Food Bug?
Part Two
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Food safety concerns everyone, since everyone needs to eat. Make sure that all family members wash their hands before helping with food preparation and before eating. Remember Mom calling for everyone to “wash up before dinner, now!”? She had the right idea all along. But, before serving dinner, someone must prepare the meal. In order to keep from poisoning the dinner guests, the food must be cooked and served properly. With the food washed, the surfaces washed and the cook’s hands washed, everything’s ready for cooking and serving food. Most families enjoy a salad as a first course. Be sure to chop and cut all produce on a sanitary cutting board. The vegetables and fruits should be prepared first, as meats, poultry, eggs and fish can carry bacteria which are hard to clean off of countertops and cutting boards. Once the salad comes together, put it in the refrigerator until dinnertime. Side dishes can be prepped and refrigerated until cooking time. If the side dish contains no meat, poultry, fish or eggs, it can be cooked for the time indicated in the recipe. If it contains eggs, be sure to cook it thoroughly, with the egg white and yolk firm, or until the temperature is at least 160°F. Danger lurks in the form of potential food poisoning when cooking meat, poultry, eggs or fish improperly. The Iowa State University Extension office suggests consumers do the following when cooking meat, especially ground meat:

- Cooking food, including ground meat patties, to an internal temperature of at least 160°F (72°C) usually protects against food borne illness.
- Ground beef can be contaminated with potentially dangerous E. coli 0157:H7 bacteria.
- The US Department of Agriculture Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) advised consumers to use a meat thermometer when cooking hamburger and not rely on the internal color of the meat to be sure it is safe to eat. This change resulted from research that indicates some ground meat may turn prematurely brown before a safe internal temperature of 160°F (72°C) is reached.

In fact, the USDA has a handy little chart to help you remember the correct temperatures for ensuring that meats, etc. have been cooked enough. Following is a chart of safe minimum internal temperatures:

- Beef, veal, and lamb steaks, roasts, and chops may be cooked to 145°F.
- All cuts of pork, 160°F.
- Ground beef, veal and lamb to 160°F.
- All poultry should reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F.

How do you know the food has cooked enough to reach the correct temperature? Why, with a food thermometer. Many different types of thermometers exist for many different ranges of temperature. You may be familiar with the most common and easy to use food

thermometers. One easy to use thermometer, an "oven-safe" bimetallic-coil thermometer remains in the food being cooked in the oven. Most roasts and whole birds or other large cuts of meat can be cooked with this type of thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the meat or poultry. Cooks can monitor the temperature easily by watching the gauge. Another handy thermometer, the "instant read" bimetallic-coil thermometer, reads the temperature of the food in about 15-20 seconds, but does not remain in the food during cooking. The USDA offers the following advice concerning the use of the instant-read thermometer:

For accurate temperature measurement, the probe of the bimetallic-coil thermometer must be inserted the full length of the sensing area (usually 2 to 3 inches). If measuring the temperature of a thin food, such as a hamburger patty or boneless chicken breast, the probe should be inserted through the side of the food so that the entire sensing area is positioned through the center of the food. Some models can be calibrated. Check the manufacturer's instructions.

Whichever thermometer you choose, be sure to cook foods to the proper temperature. Food borne illnesses can be eliminated with a little thought and some preventative measures. Keep the food bugs out, and if you end up with the flu bug, be sure to use safe food handling techniques with the chicken soup.

If you have any more questions about food safety, be sure to call the UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County. Master Food Preservers are available to answer home food preservation questions; leave a message at (530) 621-5506. The Master Food Preservers also sponsor free public classes from July through early November. For more information about the public education classes and activities, go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://ceeldorado.ucdavis.edu/Master_Food_Preservers/.