

# GROUND BEEF

Highest Risk

Few foods are as all-American as the hamburger. But as with all ground meats, ground beef can contain bacteria that carry a serious risk of foodborne illness. Twenty years ago, a hamburger chain made over 700 people sick from *E. coli* bacteria, including four children who died. That outbreak showed that cows carry bacteria that, if it gets into ground beef, can make consumers very sick.

Ground beef is one of the riskiest foods to have in your kitchen and anything that touches it is potentially contaminated with *Salmonella*, *E. coli*, or other hazards. Here is some advice for handling ground beef safely.

## Food Preparation

- Plastic bags can keep meat separated from other foods, both in the grocery cart and in the refrigerator, so that contaminated juices don't drip onto other foods.
- Keep raw meat refrigerated at or below 40 degrees.
- Wash and sanitize all utensils and surfaces that touch ground beef immediately. Do **not** use the same plate, cutting board, other kitchen surface or utensil for raw patties that is used for cooked patties or for salad items or fixings.
- Wear disposable plastic gloves when handling raw meat. Whether or not you wear gloves, wash hands often when handling raw meat. Make sure you clean your hands and gloves thoroughly by washing with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds.
- When making hamburgers, thinner patties help ensure that they are cooked thoroughly.

## Cooking

- Always cook ground beef dishes so that an instant-read thermometer, in the thickest part of the meat, says 160 degrees. This is **essential** to kill pathogens like *E. coli* O157:H7 and *Salmonella*. Don't rely on the color of the meat to tell when it's done.
- **Thinking of grinding meat at home or having the butcher grind meat for you?** Bacteria can be on any piece of steak, so even having steak ground for you at the butcher or at home does not mean you are safe from foodborne illness. You should cook that ground meat to 160 degrees in case any bacteria is inside.
- When eating out, you should order ground beef dishes medium-well to well-done.

## After Cooking

- Do not serve meat more than 2 hours after cooking.

**Bacteria don't know whether they are at a 5-star restaurant, expensive grocery store, or on a local farm—so practice “defensive eating” every time, no matter where you get your food, to protect yourself and your family.**



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