

Storing

- Meats should be stored at 0°F or lower as long as possible.
- If packaging is torn or open, do not use.

Best Practices for Storing Meat from Food Gatherers

Agencies/Food Programs

Agencies/Programs should keep meat FROZEN and try to use or distribute within ONE WEEK.

Frozen = 1 week

Clients

Clients should keep meat FROZEN and try to use within ONE MONTH. Once thawed, clients should COOK & EAT within TWO DAYS.

Frozen = 1 month,

Thawed in Refrigerator = 2 days

Thawing

Safely thaw meat to avoid the growth of dangerous bacteria.

- **BEST WAY: Refrigerator** - For large items, thaw 24 hours in the refrigerator for every 5 pounds of weight. For smaller items, thaw at least 24 hours. Time will vary slightly with the refrigerator's temperature, and some spaces may be colder than others. *Food thawed in the refrigerator can be refrozen without cooking*, although there may be loss of quality.
- **Cold Water** - Using a leak-proof package or plastic bag, submerge meat in cold running tap water. Thaw 30 minutes per pound. Once thawed, cook immediately. Do not refreeze without cooking.
- **Microwave** - Time depends on microwave power. Once thawed, cook immediately. Do not refreeze without cooking.
- **No thawing** - Cook completely frozen foods for about 50% longer than the recommended time for thawed or fresh meat.
- **NEVER thaw meat on the counter, or any other method without temperature control!**

Spoilage

- Regardless of the color, if meat has an off odor, is sticky or tacky to the touch, or slimy, DISCARD
- If unopened packaged is bloated or puffy, DISCARD.

Cooking

- Cook food to the following MINIMUM internal temperatures as measured by a meat thermometer:

Product	Minimum Internal Temperature & Rest Time
Beef, Pork, Veal & Lamb Steaks, chops, roasts	145 °F (62.8 °C) and allow to rest for at least 3 minutes
Ground meats	160 °F (71.1 °C)
Ham , fresh or smoked (uncooked)	145 °F (60 °C) and allow to rest for at least 3 minutes
Fully Cooked Ham (to reheat)	Reheat cooked hams packaged in USDA-inspected plants to 140 °F (60 °C); all others to 165 °F (73.9 °C).

Product	Minimum Internal Temperature
All Poultry (breasts, whole bird, legs, thighs, and wings, ground poultry, and stuffing)	165 °F (73.9 °C)
Eggs	160 °F (71.1 °C)
Fish & Shellfish	145 °F (62.8 °C)
Leftovers	165 °F (73.9 °C)
Casseroles	165 °F (73.9 °C)

Color

WHITE FROZEN PATCHES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White dried patches indicate freezer burn. The meat is still safe to eat, but the freezer burned parts will be tough and tasteless and can be trimmed away if desired.
NATURAL VARIATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poultry – (eg, Chicken, Turkey, etc..) color (bluish-white, pink, or yellow) can vary based on the age of the animal, species, sex, diet and amount of exercise it got.
DARK Ground Poultry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground poultry can vary in color depending on whether dark or light meat was used. Dark meat will result in darker pink ground meat.
CHANGE in Color during Storage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meat will naturally change color during storage. A change in color alone does not indicate spoilage. Ex. Fading and darkening alone does not affect meat’s safety. • Fresh meat unexposed to air will be purplish in color. Once exposed to air it will become bright red. Over time, meat exposed to light and air will start to become brownish-red.
DARK AREAS when cooked	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dark bones and dark meat surrounding bones in cooked poultry is safe to eat.
PINK cooked meat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooked meat may remain pink—this is safe to eat as long as all parts reach the proper temperature (listed above).
GREY or BROWN meat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some meat, like ground beef, can be gray if unexposed to air. Ex. The center of a package of ground beef can be pink/red on the outside and grayish brown on the inside. Gray color by itself doesn’t mean that meat is spoiled. • Cured raw meats can become gray over time due to the ingredients used in curing.
IRIDESCENT/ RAINBOW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iridescent colors (light that looks like the colors of the rainbow, or a greenish cast the way engine oil looks) come from natural contents of meat such as iron and fat. This meat remains safe to eat, and doesn’t represent decreased quality.