

Frozen Food Best Practices



STORING

Meat and frozen prepared foods should be stored at 0°F or lower.

Partner Programs

Should keep meat and frozen prepared foods frozen and try to use or distribute within one week.

Clients

Should keep meat and frozen prepared foods frozen and try to use within one month. Once thawed, clients should:

MEAT: Cook and eat within 2 days

FROZEN PREPARED FOODS: If applicable, reheat according to packaging instructions and eat immediately.

THAWING

Safely thaw meat to avoid the growth of dangerous bacteria. For frozen prepared foods, thaw in the refrigerator, then eat immediately or follow reheating instructions on the package.

- **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 fully cooking.
- **Microwave:** Time depends on microwave power. Once thawed, cook immediately. Do not refreeze without fully 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.
- If package is torn or open, DISCARD. (Outer packaging, such as a box can be opened/damaged as long as interior bag is still intact)

COOKING

Cook food to the following MINIMUM internal temperatures. For frozen prepared foods, follow the packages thawing/cooking instructions.

165° (74°C) FOR <1 SECOND (INSTANTANEOUS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poultry—including whole or ground chicken, turkey, or duck. • Stuffing made with fish, meat, or poultry. • Stuffed meat, seafood, poultry, or pasta. • Dishes that include previously cooked TCS (Temperature Controlled for Safety) ingredients, like previously cooked meat, grains and other foods.
155° (68°C) FOR 17 SECONDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ground meat—including beef, pork, and other meat. • Injected meat including brined ham and flavor-injected roasts. • Mechanically tenderized meat. • Ratites—including ostrich and emu. • Ground seafood—including chopped or minced seafood. • Shell eggs that will be hot-held for service. • Ground meat from game animals commercially raised and inspected.
145° (63°C) FOR 15 SECONDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seafood—including fish, shellfish, and crustaceans. • Steaks/chops of pork, beef, veal, and lamb. • Commercially raised game. • Shell eggs that will be served immediately.
145° (63°C) FOR 4 MINUTES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roasts of pork, beef, veal, and lamb.
135° (57°C) NO MINIMUM TIME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food from plants, fruit, vegetables, grains, (e.g., rice, pasta) and legumes (e.g., beans, refried beans) that will be hot-held for service.

COLOR

Color of Meat	Description
White Frozen Patches	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	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	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 PROPER Storage	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 After Cooked	Dark bones and dark meat surrounding bones in cooked poultry is safe to eat.
Pink Meat After Cooking	Cooked meat may remain pink—this is safe to eat as long as all parts reach the proper temperature (listed above).
Gray and Brown Meat	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	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.