

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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May 5, 2011

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How Do We Keep Our Food Safe These Days?

You surely saw or heard the recent news stories about how much of our meat supply has bacteria on it. The report just checked 136 samples, from 26 stores. But they found a lot, 47% with *Staphylococcus aureus* on them. *Staph a.* is just one of many different kinds of bacteria that could make us sick and that could be found on meats. Actually we should not have been surprised at all about their numbers, that 47% of the samples they checked had bacteria. Many people are carriers of *Staph*, meaning that a lot of us have it on us all the time. Carriers don't get sick, they just pass it on to other people. Many animals also carry *Staph* and other bacteria as well. But more importantly, it's easy to be sure that we don't get sick from any of them.

Protecting yourself from potentially contaminated food is not that hard. The most important tool you need is a food thermometer. Get a digital one, so you can use it in thin foods like pork chops and hamburger patties. *Staph*, *Salmonella*, *E. coli* and all the other pathogens (the ones that can make us sick) do not like heat. Cook them and they keel over and die! How hot do they have to get? Not all that hot. They'll all be dead at the following temperatures.

Cook pieces of beef (steaks, roasts) until the center of the piece is **145°F**. Cook ground beef to **160°F**. The higher temperature is needed because grinding the meat means there could be bacteria the whole way through the burger or meatloaf, not just on the outside. Cook pork, whether it's in pieces or ground, to **160°F** too. Chicken and

all poultry needs to get to **165°F** in the middle of the thickest part of muscle to be sure the bacteria are killed. Poultry needs the higher temperature because we buy it with the skin still on, and skin is where a lot of the bacteria will be. When did you buy a steak that still had the animal hide attached to it?

When you're reheating leftovers, make sure the center of the dish gets to **165°F**, and cook everything you cook in a microwave to **165°F**. Leftovers are a higher risk because they've been cooked, handled and cooled, so they had more chance to be contaminated. And since they usually have several foods (meat, vegetable, starch) combined they're likely to have the right food for a lot of different bacteria. Foods cooked in microwaves need the highest temperature because microwaves don't do as good a job of killing bacteria, and because the heating is usually uneven.

Do not, **DO NOT** think you can trust your eyes to tell when meat is cooked! The color of meat depends on air, acidity and heat. Freezing and thawing ground beef can affect how it changes color. How old an animal was affects the color. Sometimes meat will turn brown before it is hot enough, other times it will still be pink when it's seriously overcooked. Use that food thermometer every time you cook meat or poultry!

Other things we need to do to keep those bacteria in check are to wash, wash and wash. Wash your hands before and after handling raw meat and poultry. Wash counters, tables and sink areas after handling raw meats. Don't let juices get from meat onto any other foods or utensils. And of course, keep meat and poultry cold until you're ready to cook it. Then get it hot enough to kill the bacteria. And either keep it hot, or chill it again quickly, so that nothing floating by has a chance to grow. Hot, Cold, Clean, and Separate are the 4 rules for food safety.

Oh, one final note, if you still have any of those Easter eggs sitting around, it's past time to get rid of them! Boiled eggs have a safe storage time of just 5 days, so pitch them before someone decides to eat one.

Here's a quick way to make meat loaf. In muffin cups they cook in half an hour. Use the thermometer to be sure the ones in the middle of the pan are done!

#### Mexicali Mini Loaves

|   |                                   |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1 ½ lb lean ground beef                     | 2/3 C skim or lowfat milk         |
| 1/3 C salsa (mild or hot, your choice)      | ½ C shredded Mexican cheese blend |
| 1 can 4.5-oz chopped green chilies, drained | 1 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce       |
| 1 Tbsp prepared mustard                     | 1 clove garlic, finely chopped    |
| 3 slices bread, torn in small pieces        | ¼ C chopped onion (1 small)       |
| 1 egg                                       | ¼ C salsa                         |

Salt, pepper if desired.

Heat oven to 350°F. Spray 12 regular-size muffin cups with cooking spray. Mix all ingredients except last ¼ C of salsa in large bowl until evenly blended. (Wearing plastic gloves and doing it with your hands is easy.) Form mixture into 12 balls (not quite baseball size) and put in muffin cups. Brush tops with remaining ¼ C salsa. Put muffin pan on cookie sheet to catch drips. Bake about 30 minutes, or until middle of center loaves reaches 160°F. Serve hot with barbeque sauce. Serves 6.