

# Colorado State University - Denver Extension

## Frequently Asked Questions About

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### Family & Consumer

#### **The power went out in my home and the refrigerator/freezer was without power. Is the food ok to eat?**

Factors that affect how long food stays frozen if it is in the freezer with the door shut include: the amount of food in the freezer, the kind of food, the freezer temperature before it quit, the amount of freezer insulation and the size of the freezer.

If food is safe to eat, it is safe to refreeze. If ice crystals remain in foods, it is usually safe to refreeze them although there will be changes in the texture, flavor and color, and the nutritional value may be lower.

For more information: check out CSU Information Sheet # 9.357 [www.ext.colostate.edu](http://www.ext.colostate.edu)

#### **Does handwashing help prevent the flu?**

Handwashing helps prevent the spread of flu? by Pat Kendall, Ph.D., R.D. Food Science and Human Nutrition Specialist Colorado State University Cooperative Extension

The shortage of flu vaccine this year is making us think twice about the impending flu season. Without a flu shot, will we get the flu? How bad will it be? Will we spread it to others?

Luckily, we can follow a number of practices that will reduce our chances of getting the flu and spreading it to others. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, next to getting a flu shot, the single most important thing you can do to prevent the spread of infection is to wash your hands. In the hospital, this means washing your hands between patients or before visits to patients. In the home, it means washing your hands before preparing food, after changing diapers, after using the bathroom and after sneezing, blowing your nose, rubbing your eyes or smoking.

It seems we know we should be washing our hands, but aren't actually doing it. For example, in one nationwide study, 94 percent of consumers surveyed said they always washed their hands after using the restroom. However, observers planted in public restrooms in five major cities found that only 68 percent, in fact, did so. Women were somewhat more likely than men to wash up (74 percent versus 61 percent), but neither group came close to doing what they said they did.

In a study reported in the Journal of Infectious Diseases in Children, fecal coliforms were detected on the hands of some 20 percent of the day-care staff evaluated. Further, one-third of the facilities studied had poor handwashing systems and no policy for handwashing before eating or after playing outside.

The CDC recommends vigorous scrubbing with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds, then rinsing with clear water and drying with a clean towel. Any type of soap will do. It's not necessary to use anti-bacterial soap. In fact, the American Academy of Microbiology warns against widespread use of anti-microbial products as they are likely to lead to the development of more resistant bacteria.

In addition to regular handwashing, a number of other practices will help keep us healthy, resistant to infection and less likely to spread disease.

These include:

- Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains, which are important sources of antioxidants to help strengthen immune function. - Get plenty of exercise. Regular exercise also helps boost the immune system so you are better prepared to fend off infections. - Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated and help flush toxins from the body. - Avoid close contact with people who are sick. - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs are often spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose or mouth. - When you are sick, keep your distance from others to protect them from also getting sick. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. If possible, stay home from work, school and errands until you're no longer contagious. - If you are not able to get a flu shot, consider getting the nasal-spray flu vaccine. This vaccine is made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu and is approved for use in healthy people ages 5 to 49 and women who are not pregnant.

### **How often do you think about the safety of the food you are preparing or eating?**

**Do you just assume that if food is available to eat, it must be safe?**

Be Aware As You Prepare. Being aware starts with keeping the four steps of food safety in mind:

- Clean
- Separate
- Cook
- Chill

Clean: Wash hands and surfaces often. Cleanliness is a major factor in preventing foodborne illness. Bacteria introduced by humans, pets or foods can easily spread throughout the kitchen and get onto cutting boards, utensils, sponges and counter tops.

To help promote cleanliness:

1. Wash your hands with hot, soapy water before handling food and after using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling pets.
2. Wash your cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops with hot soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go on to the next food.
3. Consider using paper towels to clean up kitchen surfaces. If you use cloth towels, wash them often in the hot cycle of your washing machine.

Separate: Don't cross-contaminate. Cross-contamination occurs when harmful bacteria are transferred from one food or surface to other food products. This often happens when you clean or cut up raw meat, poultry or seafood, then use the same sink, cutting board or knife to prepare salad ingredients and other foods that will be served raw or without further cooking.

To avoid cross-contamination:

1. Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from other foods in your grocery shopping cart and in your refrigerator. if possible, use different cutting boards for raw meat products and products that are served without further cooking.
2. Always wash hands, cutting boards, dishes and utensils with hot, soapy water after they come in contact with raw meat, poultry and seafood and before continuing cooking.
3. Never place cooked food on a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry or seafood.

Cook to proper temperatures. To ensure a safe product, meats, poultry, fish and eggs all need to be cooked to a temperature that ensures the destruction of harmful bacteria that may be present. This temperature varies with the product. For some products, visual clues can be used to determine doneness. Reliable visual clues for eggs are firm yolks and whites; for fish, flaking easily with a fork. However, for ground beef, the long-standing visual clue - no pinkness left - doesn't ensure that a safe temperature has been reached. Some ground beef will turn brown long before the recommended internal temperature of 160 degrees F has been reached and some will remain pink even at 160 degrees F. Because of this, food safety experts

recommend using a clean thermometer to make sure meat and poultry products have reached safe internal temperatures.

Chill: Refrigerate promptly. It is important to refrigerate foods quickly, because cold temperatures keep harmful bacteria from growing and multiplying. Use a refrigerator thermometer to make sure your refrigerator is between 35 and 40 degrees F and your freezer is at zero degrees F or below. If you have prepared extras or have leftovers, divide these into small, shallow containers and refrigerate quickly after preparation or service. And be careful not to overfill your refrigerator, which does a better job of keeping food cool and safe when air can circulate around the food.

by Pat Kendall, Ph.D., R.D. Food Science and Human Nutrition Specialist Colorado State University  
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## **Food and Nutrition Education Development**

### **Is there a handy chart for ingredient substitutions for cooking?**

It is sometimes more convenient to substitute an ingredient than it is to go out and purchase the necessary ingredient. When substituting, take into account the differences in taste, moisture content, texture and weight. When substituting for sugar and flour, consider the differences in sweetening and thickening power. Measuring accurately will help avoid disappointments. For more information: check out CSU Information Sheet # 9.329 [www.ext.colostate.edu](http://www.ext.colostate.edu)

## **Gardening, Horticulture and the Environment**

### **What is a Master Gardener?**

Master Gardeners are community volunteers trained to work with CSU Cooperative Extension in answering the thousands of questions received from the public every year. Master Gardeners are about community helping community with support from trained Extension staff horticulturists and the resources of Colorado State University. All Denver Metro counties provide Master Gardener program opportunities to their communities. Contact the CSU Denver Cooperative Extension Master Gardener at 720-913-5278, or check their web page at [www.colostate.edu/Depts/CoopExt/4DMG/](http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/CoopExt/4DMG/)

How does the Master Gardener program operate?

Community people are recruited and trained for a one year volunteer experience with CSU Denver Cooperative Extension. Notice to apply appears in October and written applications are taken through early November. Personal interviews with Master Gardeners experienced in the program are completed in mid-November. A class is selected prior to Thanksgiving and classes start in January. Entry into the program is competitive and trainees are charged a nominal materials fee.

Daytime classes are held one day per week for ten weeks (60 hours of training). In return for the training, Master Gardeners volunteer 50 hours during the busy growing season from April through October. Volunteers contribute 21 hours on the phone answering gardening questions from the public and the remainder of their 50 hours in activities of their choice. These include staffing farmers markets, answering questions at garden shows, teaching youth to garden, speaking to groups, writing articles for Denver newspapers and the Denver Master Gardener web page, helping on a TV viewer helpline, and more.

Unlike traditional classes, you learn more by applying your learning to help people with their real-life questions. You are not trained to be experts, but in how to find answers for people. Looking up answers and consulting the horticulturists on staff provide additional learning opportunities. Cooperative Extension is consulted by the public for information on a wide variety of plant topics including choice of plants, insect control, safe use of pesticides, composting, water saving gardening, problem wildlife concerns and more. Volunteering with community people with similar interests provides an enjoyable way to make new friends and learn from them.

Interested? Phone to find out more or leave your name, address and phone number to receive an application in October. Phone the Master Gardener at 720-913-5278, e-mail [denvermg@coop.ext.colostate.edu](mailto:denvermg@coop.ext.colostate.edu). More information can be found on the Denver Master Gardener web page at: [www.colostate.edu/Depts/CoopExt/4DMG/](http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/CoopExt/4DMG/)

Does the temperature of water used to water houseplants really matter, particularly for African violets?

Winter tap water temperature is often too cold for houseplant roots. Draw water in a container and allow it to warm to room temperature before watering houseplants, particularly the ones that originate in the tropics. Note that if your African violet has developed yellow or white splotches and rings on the leaves this winter, it is most likely due to water temperatures and not some strange disease. African violets are sensitive to the difference between the air and water temperature, and they develop spots when the water is colder than the air. Symptoms don't develop in other seasons because the temperature difference between the two isn't that great. Use room-temperature water and avoid splashing water onto the leaves. Even with a change to room temperature water, existing spots won't disappear but future leaf growth will be "spotless".

### **Why do leaves drop on houseplants, especially in winter?**

Leaves on houseplants may drop for many reasons. The prime cause of leaf drop is over watering. The top of the soil in potted plants rapidly dries, especially in the dry air of rooms heated by furnaces. Underneath the top inch or two it can still be moist and water is not yet needed. Before watering, check the soil by pushing in a finger up to the first or second knuckle. If the soil is moist to the touch, wait a day or two, and then recheck. When the soil feels dry to your buried fingertip, it's time to water. Pour water on the soil until it comes out of the bottom of the container. Let it drain for 15 or 20 minutes, then discard the excess water from the saucer underneath the plant. This avoids submerging the bottom and often healthiest roots in the container, a situation that often kills them and causes leaf drop.

Lower light levels and short winter days can cause leaf drop. When a new plant is brought home, it may shed leaves in response to lower light intensities than the bright greenhouse it came from. Once the adjustment is made, leaf drop usually stops unless the plant species is simply not adapted to the reduced light conditions. Temperature changes can also be responsible and may combine with low light levels to produce annual leaf drop on some plants such as Chinese evergreen.

Low humidity in Colorado during winter can be another cause, particularly for some dry air intolerant plants, such as many ferns. Placing plants in naturally humid areas, such as in the kitchen or bathroom, will help as long as other growing requirements are met.