

# Wash your Hands ...Not your Poultry

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*Despite recommendations against the practice, some consumers persist in washing raw poultry (chicken, turkey, duck) before cooking. Historically, we equate washing to cleanliness. We wash clothes, linens, cars, dishes, and ourselves. So, some people believe meat and poultry can be made cleaner and safer by washing it. Is this true?*

We can look to research to answer the question: **Does washing meat and poultry before cooking promote food safety?** But before we answer that question, we have to define the term 'cross contamination.' Cross contamination is when bacteria are spread from one surface to another. Cross contamination can happen when the bacteria on raw meat and poultry, or in meat 'juice', are spread to other foods, utensils, and surfaces (including the surface of your kitchen sink).

A study by European researchers found that there is actually a potential **increase** in the risk of foodborne illness for individuals who wash chicken prior to cooking it. The researchers found that bacteria already present on chicken can travel up to 3-feet from where the meat is washed, contaminating surfaces across the kitchen. And failure to clean these contaminated areas leads to more cases of foodborne illness.

And while washing may appear to make chicken or turkey look 'cleaner,' **washing actually fails to dislodge harmful bacteria** which may be adhering to the surface of a poultry carcass. Researchers from the University of Georgia found that once bacteria are firmly attached, rinsing will not effectively remove them. Dr. H. Lillard found that bacteria could still be recovered from the **40<sup>th</sup> rinse** of a single chicken carcass! The bacteria that are dislodged could be spreading to your hands, the sink, your countertops, and other surfaces -but most would remain and would only be destroyed by cooking to a safe internal temperature.

The two pathogens most commonly associated with raw or uncooked poultry are ***Campylobacter jejuni*** and ***Salmonella spp.*** Foodborne illness sickens an estimated 47.8 million individuals in the United States each year, causing an estimated 127,839 hospitalizations and 3,037 deaths. Of this vast number of foodborne illnesses, an estimated 845,024 illnesses are caused by *Campylobacter jejuni* , and a further 1,027,561 illness by non-typhoid *Salmonella spp.*

*Campylobacter* is one of the most common causes of diarrheal illness in the United States. Most people who become ill with campylobacteriosis, the illness caused by *Campylobacter*, get diarrhea, cramping, abdominal pain, and fever within two to five days after exposure to the organism. The diarrhea may be bloody and can be accompanied by nausea and vomiting. Campylobacteriosis occurs much more frequently in the summer months than in the winter.

A person who becomes infected with *Salmonella* generally develops diarrhea, fever, and abdominal cramps 12 to 72 hours after infection. The illness usually lasts four to seven days, and, in some persons, the diarrhea may be so severe that the patient needs to be hospitalized. Infection with *Salmonella* can, in some cases, cause death.

**Follow these easy steps to keep your family food-safe:**

**Clean** - Wash hands, utensils, and cutting boards before and after contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs to avoid spreading bacteria when preparing food. Wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds, enough time to sing the ‘ABCs.’ Dry hands on a clean towel.

**Separate** - Use different cutting boards for meat, poultry, seafood, and vegetables and keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs apart from foods that won’t be cooked. Clean contaminated cutting boards with soap and warm water, rinse, and sanitize with a dilute bleach solution prepared from 1 Tablespoon of bleach dissolved in one gallon of warm water. Allow to air-dry. Filling a spray bottle with a dilute bleach solution and misting rinsed surfaces is a great way to kill any bacteria remaining on surfaces.

**Cook** – Use a food thermometer - you can't tell if a food item is done by how it looks! If rinsing doesn’t make poultry or other meat safe to eat, cooking will. Cook all meat to a safe internal temperature:

Meat Item	Temperature
<b>Ground Meat &amp; Meat Mixtures</b>	
Beef, Pork, Veal, Lamb	160°F
Turkey, Chicken	165°F
<b>Fresh Beef, Veal, Lamb (not ground)</b>	
Medium rare	145°F
Medium	160°F
Well Done	170°F
<b>Poultry</b>	
Chicken & Turkey (whole or parts)	165°F
<b>Fresh Pork</b>	
Medium	160°F
Well Done	170°F
<b>Seafood</b>	
Fin Fish	145°F, flesh is opaque



**Chill** - Keep your refrigerator at 40°F or below to keep bacteria from growing and chill leftovers and takeout foods within 2 hours. Bring plenty of ice to summertime picnics.

For more information, see <http://www.befoodsafe.org/>