

HYGIENE Practices for Handling Meat and Meat Products



食物環境衛生署
Food and Environmental
Hygiene Department

Meat and meat products are very nutritious and they are also our major food-stuffs. Everyone acknowledges freshness is very important in the buying of meat but not everyone realises that subsequent handling is even more important since many foodborne illnesses such as food infections caused by Salmonella, Campylobacter and Escherichia coli O157:H7 and food intoxication by Staphylococcus aureus are commonly associated with the ingestion of contaminated meat and meat products. To protect public health by upholding meat safety and meat hygiene, fresh provision shop/market-stall operators, members of the food trade and the public are advised to observe the following practices when handling meat and meat products:



(I) Meat Hygiene

Source

- Select and buy meat from a reputable supplier, importer, licensed fresh provision shop or market stall. Retailers may demand documentary proof, such as a valid and recognised health certificate from wholesalers/importers if the meat is imported, to prove that the meat is sound, wholesome and from an approved source.

Purchase

- Do not buy meat which looks and smells abnormal; dripping, slimy surface and discolouration tell the meat quality is inferior;
- Do not buy meat with unusually bright red colour, non-sticky surface and abnormal lustre as these may be caused by prohibited preservative sulphur dioxide;
- Read the label of prepackaged meat and meat products to ensure that the 'Best Before/Use By' date is not yet expired and the ingredient(s) is/are meeting your demand; and
- Remember not to buy meat from hawkers and unlicensed fresh provision shops, as their sources of supply are always doubtful.

Handling

- Do not leave meat carcasses and offal on floor. Cutting or washing of meat and offal should be done indoors on a clean working table or in a wash-up sink;

- Handle and store meat carcasses and offal separately to prevent the meat from contamination by bacteria of the bowel;
- Thaw out frozen meat either in refrigerator at a temperature between 0°C and 4°C or inside a microwave oven. Process and cook thawed-out meat as soon as possible to reduce the chance of contamination;
- Handle cooked and raw meat with separate utensils; utensils should be properly labelled for such uses to prevent cross contamination; and
- Wash meat before slicing and mincing.

Transportation

- During transportation, the cabin for fresh meat should be air-conditioned in order to maintain its temperature at 20°C or below;
- The cabin for fresh meat should be enclosed fully;
- In the cabin, fresh meat and offal should be stored separately; and
- During transportation, the cabins for chilled and frozen meat should be air-conditioned in order to maintain their temperatures respectively at 0°C to 4°C and -18°C or below.

Storage

- Never store meat and meat products at room temperatures. Fresh or thawed-out meat should be stored in refrigerator at a temperature between 0°C and 4°C, and frozen meat should be stored at a temperature below -18°C. Remember to refrigerate meat and meat products appropriately and immediately when you return home from market;
- Do not wrap meat with newspaper, unclean materials or coloured plastic bags. Store meat in closed containers for proper protection;
- Keep cooked and raw meat separately.
Always place cooked meat in the upper part of a refrigerator to prevent contamination by dripping of raw meat;
- Avoid overstocking to reduce storage time; and
- Never add any preservatives, such as boric acid or sulphur dioxide, on meat to prolong its shelf life. Adding preservatives on meat is an offence in law. Upon conviction, offender shall be liable to a fine of \$50,000 and to imprisonment for 6 months.



Sale

- Do not expose meat for sale under direct sunshine. Fresh meat should be sold at a cool and dry place. Frozen meat and meat products should be displayed for sale in refrigerator at a temperature below -18°C .

(II) Equipment Hygiene

- Always keep all utensils and equipment like cutlery, chopping boards, meat tables, slicers and mincers clean and dry. They should be thoroughly cleaned and sanitized by boiling water or an approved bactericidal agent after use;
 - Render all meat containers clean by thorough cleaning and sanitization after use and by keeping them in a dust- and insect-proof cupboard until further use;
 - Wash and change wiping cloths frequently. They should be disinfected by boiling water or an approved bactericidal agent before re-use; and
 - Keep refrigerators clean and defrost them when necessary.



(III) Personal Hygiene

- Wear clean and easily washable overalls at work. Overalls should be in light colour;
- Keep hands clean. Wash hands thoroughly before/after processing meat, after handling refuse and visiting toilet. Also, remember to clean and trim fingernails regularly;
- Stop handling and preparing meat when suffering from sore throat or gastrointestinal disturbances such as vomiting or diarrhoea;
- Cover cuts and septic wounds on skin with water-proof dressings to prevent bacterial contamination of meat;
- Do not smoke inside kitchens or any food rooms; and
- Kick out all bad personal habits such as head, nose and ear picking and do not cough or sneeze around meat.

Enquiry

For further enquiries and information, please call Food and Environmental Hygiene Department's Communication Resource Unit at 2381 6096 or the 24-hour enquiry hotline 2868 0000.