

Sausage comes in many forms, and can contain many different meats—beef, pork, chicken, and turkey. Hot dogs, kielbasa, hard pepperoni, hard salami, and bratwurst are all types of sausage. For the most part, sausage is low risk, but there are still some hazards consumers should be aware of. Pregnant women should be especially careful of hot dogs, since they can carry *Listeria* bacteria that can cause miscarriage. Use these tips to avoid illnesses from sausage.

## Food Preparation

- Wear disposable plastic gloves when handling raw meat. Whether or not you wear gloves, wash hands often when handling raw meat. Make sure you clean your hands and gloves thoroughly by washing with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds.
- Do **not** use the same plate, cutting board, other kitchen surface or utensil for raw sausage that is used for cooked meat or fixings. Wash and sanitize all utensils and surfaces that touch raw meat immediately.

## Cooking

- Cook pork sausages so that an instant-read thermometer says 145 degrees and then allow them to rest for 3 minutes to continue cooking; cook beef sausages to 160 degrees; and poultry sausages to 165 degrees. If you are cooking mixed-meat sausages (such as beef and pork sausage), you should cook it to the higher temperature (160 degrees).
- Pregnant women should fully reheat even pre-cooked sausage and hot dog products until they are steaming to avoid illness from *Listeria*. *Listeria* is serious and can cause miscarriage, stillbirth, or severe illness in newborns.

## After Cooking

- Because *Listeria* can survive on the outside of sausage packages, you should keep sausages or hot dogs in plastic bags, so that they don't touch the refrigerator or other foods.
- You can safely store an unopened package of sausage in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks. Once the package has been opened, you should eat the food or toss it out within 1 week.

**Bacteria don't know whether they are at a 5-star restaurant, expensive grocery store, or on a local farm—so practice “defensive eating” every time, no matter where you get your food, to protect yourself and your family.**

## Want to know how sausage is made?

Sausages and hot dogs use the same leftover meats also found in ground beef. First, meat trimmings are removed from the bones using high pressure or other advanced techniques. Because of concerns about Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE, or “mad cow disease”), for beef sausages the process has been refined to ensure that no bones are included. For poultry, chicken and turkey bones can be pulverized or ground as part of the process, and the resulting batter or paste is called “mechanically separated.” In fact, poultry sausages can be made entirely of this paste, as long as the product label says “mechanically separated chicken or turkey.”

Once the meat has formed a paste or batter, the product is mixed with fat, binders and extenders (such as cereal or dry milk), water, and flavorings. Although there are rules for how much fat, water, and other ingredients can be added to sausage and hot dogs, these foods are typically still among the highest sodium and least nutritious.

Finally, the meat mixture is pushed through tubes or funnels into the casings. The casings on ready-to-eat sausage are made of animal intestines, but may also include artificial colorings. If natural, animal intestine casings are from a different species than the meat inside the casing (such as a turkey sausage inside a pork casing), the label has to say so. For fresh sausage, the casing can be made of animal intestines or even cellulose or plastic—but those casings must be removed prior to cooking.

