



## Pork and swine flu: the rest of the story

**I keep hearing that even though swine flu is spreading, pork is safe to eat as long as it is cooked properly. What does that mean?**

What you are hearing is exactly correct. But the way these kinds of messages are worded can be confusing. It almost sounds as if you could contract swine flu if you eat pork that's improperly cooked — and that is absolutely *not* correct.

Viruses that cause influenza, including swine flu, are airborne, not food-borne. You can't get the flu from eating pork, BBQ chicken, green beans or anything else — unless someone who has the flu sneezes on your plate before you dig in. But that's not a pork problem. That's a people problem.

Still, the "cook properly" part of the message is important. All raw meat, including pork, must be cooked thoroughly to be safe. That's just a fact of life.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service has detailed information on pork safety on its Web site, at [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/FactSheets/Pork\\_From\\_Farm\\_to\\_Table/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/FactSheets/Pork_From_Farm_to_Table/index.asp). In short, all fresh pork must be cooked to 160 degrees F, which is hot enough to kill pork-related pathogens such as *Trichinella spiralis*, which causes trichinosis, *E. coli*, *Salmonella*, *Staphylococcus aureus* and *Listeria monocytogenes*.

Proper meat handling before and after cooking is also essential to reduce risk of food-borne illness. For example, the best way to defrost fro-

zen meat is in the refrigerator. Never do so on the countertop or anywhere at room temperature because that allows any bacteria on the meat to multiply rapidly. Even cooking the meat afterwards might not offer protection, because some types of bacteria produce toxins as they multiply that aren't killed by heat.

Also, be sure to thoroughly wash all utensils, cutting boards and other surfaces that come into contact with raw meat before using them for anything else.

Finally, the absolute best way to protect yourself from both food-borne illness and from flu viruses is to wash your hands thoroughly and often. To do so, run hot water over your hands — at least 100 degrees. It should be as hot as you can stand and still be able to keep your hands under water. Then apply soap and scrub your hands, wrists and forearms. Be sure to get under your fingernails and between your fingers.

Wash your hands for 15 to 20 seconds — time yourself, it's longer than it sounds. Then rinse thoroughly in running water, which allows microorganisms to be washed away. To dry, use a fresh paper towel or warm-air dryer. Cloth towels used previously may have become contaminated.

For more information on swine flu, see the CDC web site at [http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/swineflu\\_you.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/swineflu_you.htm).

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



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**Editor:**

We're posting this week's column a few days early to help answer questions related to the swine flu outbreak.

This column was reviewed by Julie Shertzer, registered dietitian and program specialist for Ohio State University Extension in the Department of Human Nutrition, in the College of Education and Human Ecology.

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