



Food Safety & Nutrition

Washing Raw Meat Does Not Protect Against Illness

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
CLARK COUNTY EXTENSION

Sandra Brown

Food Safety and Nutrition Faculty

Lots of people think that rinsing or soaking meat and poultry improves safety. However, when you cook whole pieces of meat, pork, or poultry, a cooking temperature above 160°F on the surface of the product will destroy any disease causing bacteria. The USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline does not recommend washing or rinsing raw beef, pork, lamb, poultry, or veal before cooking. In fact, unless you do careful job of cleaning and sanitizing the sink or the container you used to rinse or soak the meat, you run the risk of moving disease causing bacteria from the meat or poultry to other places in your kitchen like food preparation surfaces and utensils. And, if you fail to wash your hands, it is easy to spread bacteria to other foods during preparation. This is called cross contamination. Cross contamination is a significant cause of foodborne illness.

Some consumers also believe that soaking will decrease the sodium content of ham, bacon, or salt pork, but very little is removed during washing, rinsing, or soaking meat or pork products.

Does washing eggs improve their safety?

Eggs are frequently associated with a common type of disease causing bacteria called salmonella. Surface contamination of eggs is an important health and safety concern to producers. If you purchase commercially produced eggs, they have been washed. Federal regulations clearly define washing procedures as well as the types of chemicals that can be used during the commercial processing of eggs. Commercial egg washing is very effective in the removal of bacteria. But, washing also removes the protective, natural coating called “bloom” on the eggs. After washing, egg producers replace the natural coating with a light coating of edible mineral oil. The coating, whether natural or edible mineral oil is important to prevent bacteria from permeating the shell of the egg during storage. If you did wash commercially processed eggs, you would remove the protective covering and with the extra handling increase the risk of contamination – especially if shell is cracked. Washing eggs is not recommended.

Is it important to wash fresh produce?

It is always important to wash fresh produce before preparing or eating. By placing the produce under cold running water, you can easily remove dirt as well as reduce the bacteria that might be present on the produce. The Food Safety Inspection Service recommends that produce with firm surfaces like apples or potatoes are scrubbed with a brush. You should not, however wash fruits and vegetables with detergents or soap. Commercially, the Food and Drug Administration must approve any substance used on the surface of produce during washing. Household soaps and detergents are not approved for this purpose. They could leave residues on the food that might pose health risks to you and your family. The Proctor and Gamble Corporation is introducing an approved produce wash that will be introduced to consumers this spring in retail stores.

For more information contact WSU Extension at 360-397-6060.