



EATING 101

RU DINING HEALTHY?

A WEEKLY NEWSLETTER BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE RU HEALTHY DINING TEAM
A Joint Program Between Rutgers Dining Services and The New Jersey Institute for Food, Nutrition, and Health

The Invisible Threat of Foodborne Illness: Know Your Facts

Did you know that one in six people in America fall ill every year due to a foodborne illness? Also known as “food poisoning”, these illnesses happen when food or drinks are contaminated biologically (such as bacteria, viruses, parasites, or fungi), chemically (such as toxins or heavy metals), or physically (such as hair, glass, plastic, or metal fragments). Many foodborne illnesses can cause sudden symptoms like upset stomach, diarrhea, and vomiting. While many people may recover within a few days, foodborne illnesses can lead to more serious complications if left untreated. The Healthy Dining Team is here to help you level up your food safety game! Check out some common myths vs. facts below and become a campus food safety pro.

Myth	Fact
“The last meal eaten is what causes foodborne illness.”	Foodborne illness can take hours or even days to present symptoms. The real culprit might be something you ate long before your most recent meal.
“It is fine to leave out pizza or takeout overnight.”	Foods left at room temperature may enter the temperature “danger zone” (40°F–140°F), where bacteria can multiply rapidly. Therefore, food left out for more than two hours should be discarded to avoid foodborne illness.
“You can tell if something is fully cooked just by how it looks or feels.”	Color and feel are not reliable indicators of doneness. Insert a food thermometer into the thickest part of the food to ensure it has reached the proper temperature: 165°F for poultry, 160°F for ground meats, 145°F for fish.
“Cooking or reheating food in a microwave kills all bacteria.”	Microwaves typically heat food unevenly, allowing bacteria to survive in cold spots. Always stir halfway through cooking or reheating food, and ensure the temperature reaches 165°F, which is safe for consumption.
“If it looks and smells fine, it is safe to eat.”	Some bacteria, such as Listeria and Salmonella, do not alter the appearance or odor of food. This is why it is especially important to handle, cook, store, and dispose of food properly.
“When going for seconds, it is okay to bring your used plate back up to the buffet, to avoid extra dishes.”	Reusing plates for second servings can introduce bacteria from people’s hands and mouth, which may contaminate the food. Additionally, food on the reused plate can contain bacteria that may have multiplied at room temperature.

Rutgers Dining takes food safety extremely seriously. Every meal served follows strict guidelines to ensure it is safe, fresh, and of high quality. Dining Services employs a full-time sanitarian on campus to ensure that food safety standards are met. If you believe you may have experienced symptoms of a foodborne illness or were exposed to unsafe food in the dining hall, please speak with a dining hall manager or our sanitarian at joborja@dining.rutgers.edu. Reporting incidents helps us investigate promptly and maintain a safe dining community.

When in Doubt, Toss It out!

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References: *Foodborne Illnesses and Outbreaks*. Available at:

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Available at: <https://doh.wa.gov/you-and-your-family/food-safety/food-safety-myths>. Accessed on 10/19/2025. *Serving Up Safe Buffets*.

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