Preventing Food-Borne Illness At Home

What can consumers do to at home to prevent foodborne illness?

- **Don’t assume everything is safe.** Wash your own produce even if it says "prewashed" on the bag.

- Wash produce in cold, free-flowing water that goes down the drain rather than in a sink full of cold water. Use a strainer so produce does not touch the bottom of the sink.

- **Invest in an inexpensive thermometer** for your home refrigerator. Most people have no idea how cold, or warm, their refrigerator really is. Items stored in the door are 3 to 5 degrees warmer. So place a thermometer in the door of your refrigerator. **Products will last anywhere from 7 to 10 days if stored at 41°F or below.**

- **Wash your hands.** Most people do a 5-second quick wash with cold water and no soap. **Scrub your hands vigorously for 20 seconds** (sing “Happy Birthday” to yourself twice) with soap and warm water to loosen bacteria and wash it away.

- **Replace wooden or plastic cutting boards** when they become so scored that they are hard to clean and sanitize.

- **Keep raw meats separated from ready to eat foods** by using separate cutting boards and knives.

- **Never thaw at room temperature.** Use the refrigerator, cold running water, or the microwave oven to thaw.

- Wash counters, sinks, door handles, etc. with **warm soapy water then sanitize** with a kitchen sanitizing product, or a mixture of one ounce bleach per gallon of warm water.

- Use dishwasher machine detergent that has bleach to sanitize in the dishwasher.

- Clean and sanitize refrigerator shelves and sink drains periodically.

- **Do not use sponges in the kitchen.** They harbor bacteria and are very hard to sanitize. Cloth towels that can be laundered with bleach or paper towels are better.

- **When in doubt, throw it out!** Whether it is a canned item that bubbles out when opened, mold, an unusual smell, or something that was left at room temperature more than 4 hours… **do not taste it!** Throw it away immediately.