
People at Risk: Children Under Five

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Children younger than five years are at an increased risk for foodborne illness and related health complications because their immune systems are still developing. Young children with developing immune systems cannot fight off infections as well as adults can. In addition, young children produce less stomach acid that kills harmful bacteria, making it easier for them to get sick.

Food poisoning can be particularly dangerous for young children because food poisoning often causes vomiting or diarrhea or both. Since children's bodies are small, they can quickly lose a lot of body fluid causing dehydration.

Food safety for young children depends on the food safety behaviors of their parents and caregivers. Handwashing is especially important, by children and those caring for them.

In children under 5 years old, [E. coli](#) infections are more likely to lead to hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS), a severe complication that can cause chronic kidney disease, kidney failure and death. Symptoms of HUS are urinating less often, feeling very tired, and losing pink color in cheeks and inside the lower eyelids. These new symptoms usually develop after about a week of *E. coli* illness, when the diarrhea is improving.

Choose and Prepare Safe Food

Learn about safer food choices for people with a higher risk for foodborne illness, including young children. If you prepare food for children under the age of five you should always follow the four steps:

Clean: Wash hands, utensils and surfaces often. Germs can spread and survive in many places.

Separate: Raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs can spread illness-causing bacteria to ready-to-eat foods, so keep them separate.

Cook: Food is safely cooked only when the internal temperature is high enough to kill germs that can make you sick.

Chill: Refrigerate promptly. Bacteria that cause food poisoning multiply quickest between 40°F and 140°F.

Safe Storage of Puréed and Solid Baby Food

Purees and Solids (opened or freshly made)	Refrigerator	Freezer
Strained fruits and vegetables	2 to 3 days	6 to 8 months
Strained meats and eggs	1 day	1 to 2 months
Meat/vegetable combinations	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months
Homemade baby foods	1 to 2 days	1 to 2 months

Safe Microwaving of Puréed and Solid Baby Foods

Follow these precautions when microwaving baby's food:

- Don't microwave baby foods in the jar. Instead, transfer the food to a dish before [microwaving](#) it. This way the food can be stirred and taste-tested for temperature.
- Microwave four ounces of solid food in a dish for about 15 seconds on high power. Always stir, let stand 30 seconds, and taste-test before feeding. Food that's "baby-ready" should taste or feel lukewarm.
- Don't heat baby-food meats, meat sticks, or eggs in the microwave. Use the stovetop instead. These foods have a high fat content, and since microwaves heat fats faster than other substances, these foods can cause splattering and overheating.

Safety Tips for Preparing and Storing Infant Formula

[Preparing Formula](#)

- Carefully read and follow the instructions on the infant formula container.
- Wash your hands well before preparing bottles or feeding your baby.
- Clean and sanitize the workspace where you will prepare the infant formula.
- Use clean, sanitized bottles. To learn more, read [How to Clean, Sanitize, and Store Infant](#)

[Feeding Items.](#)

- If you use powdered infant formula, use water from a safe source to mix it. If you are not sure if your tap water is safe to use for preparing infant formula, contact your [local health department](#).
- Use the amount of water listed on the instructions of the infant formula container. Always measure the water first and then add the powder.
- If your baby is very young (younger than 3 months old), was born prematurely, or has a weakened immune system, you may want to take extra precautions in preparing your infant's formula to protect against [Cronobacter](#), a rare but serious infection that can be caused by germs in powdered infant formula.
- Use prepared infant formula within 2 hours of preparation and within 1 hour from when feeding begins.
- If you do not start to use it within 2 hours, immediately store the bottle in the fridge and use it within 24 hours.
- Throw away formula left in the bottle after feeding your baby.

Heating Breast Milk or Formula

Baby's milk or infant formula does not need to be warmed before feeding, but some people like to warm their baby's bottle. If you do decide to warm the bottle, here is advice on how to warm it safely:

In Hot Tap Water: Place bottle under hot, running tap water until the desired temperature is reached. This should take 1 to 2 minutes.

On the Stove: Heat water in a pan. Remove the pan from the heat and set the bottle in it until it's warm.

When heating baby's milk, always shake the liquid to even out the temperature and test on top of your hand—not the wrist (this is one of the areas least sensitive to heat)—before feeding. Milk that's "baby-ready" should feel lukewarm.

Never heat breast milk or infant formula in the microwave. Microwaves heat baby's milk and food unevenly, which results in hot spots that can burn a baby's mouth and throat.

Additional Resources

[Once Baby Arrives, from Food Safety for Moms to Be](#) (FDA)

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