

Comments from the Inspector on Thawing Foods

Food Safety Team, USAF School of Aerospace Medicine

A critical point in preventing foodborne illnesses is in properly thawing foods. Although freezing prevents microbial growth in foods, it does not destroy all microorganisms; and if foods are improperly thawed, these microorganisms may grow and cause a foodborne illness.

The best practice is thawing foods in the refrigerator at a temperature of 41° F or less, but this method requires advance planning since it can take several days to thaw a large food item such as a roast.

Another method is submerging foods under running water. If you use this method, keep in mind that the water must be potable with a temperature of 70° F or less and must have sufficient velocity to remove loose food particles. Also the food should be prepared and cooked as soon as the temperature reaches 41° F.

Foods can also be thawed as part of a cooking process, but this is not recommended for large meat items since it would cause the exterior to be overcooked long before the interior is thawed. A microwave oven can also be used for thawing as long as the food is transferred immediately to a conventional oven with no interruption in the process

Finally, foods may be allowed to start thawing under room temperature as long as the item is placed under refrigeration when the surface of the food reaches 41° F.

For more information, contact your base Public Health office at 6-1225 or contact the Food Safety Team at the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine (Brooks AFB, TX), at (210) 536-2058 -DSN 240-2058- or E-mail a message to jose.diaz@mirage.brooks.af.mil