

Food safety expert shares tips on how a home kitchen can pass a restaurant inspection

December 24 2014, by Lindsey Elliott

With the holidays in full swing and family feasts being enjoyed, a Kansas State University food safety expert has cleaning tips on how your home kitchen could pass a restaurant inspection.

When it comes to inspecting a kitchen, Bryan Severns, food programs and services director at Kansas State University Olathe, says he looks at cleanliness, sanitation, [food preparation](#) and storage.

One cleaning mechanism that causes confusion: soapy sponges. They may clean dirt off your dishes, but they won't keep away the bacteria.

"Soap is a surfactant, which means it loosens dirt," Severns said. "A soapy sponge and water help pick up the dirt and carry it away, but the sponge does not kill anything. Unless you are replacing your sponge constantly or sanitizing it, it is an incubator for bacteria and dirt."

You can sanitize a sponge by boiling it, microwaving it or sanitizing it in the dishwasher on the sanitize setting. Instead of using a sponge, Severns suggests using dishcloths, which need to be changed daily.

Another important tip: wipe down all counters, handles and surfaces with a disinfectant—even the cutting board.

"Cutting boards often have cracks and grooves that will hold bacteria," Severns said. "The board needs to be disinfected after every use and let it air dry so the sanitizer sets in."

As for storing your food, where you place your [raw meats](#) could be a critical violation. Raw meats need to thaw on the bottom shelf to avoid dripping meat juice onto other foods and potentially contaminating ready-to-eat food.

When it comes to putting leftovers from a meal in the fridge, allow time for them to cool first.

"A lot of people will take their spaghetti, for example, put it in the container, put the lid on and pop it in the fridge," Severns said. "That lid and plastic container acts as an insulator and the food will stay warm longer than it should and start to get bacterial growth. Cooling the food off as fast as possible is safer and will improve the shelf life of the food. If the food is above room temperature, put the leftovers in the fridge without the lid then cover when cool."

Meat and poultry products typically have a [shelf life](#) of about four days, while fruits and vegetables last longer. Leftovers should be eaten in three to four days to avoid bacteria growth and always label your leftovers with the date it was made and the date it needs to be thrown out.

"We have to build that culture of food safety where everyone is thinking about taking care of each other and their [food](#)," Severns said.

Provided by Kansas State University

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