



DIET & EXERCISE

4 Things Immunocompromised People Should Know About Food Safety in the Coronavirus Pandemic

New questions about how to safely obtain, prepare, and consume food are arising during COVID-19, especially for those with suppressed immune systems.

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Anyone who eats runny eggs, doesn't bother washing fresh fruit, or leaves leftovers on the counter for hours before polishing them off is gambling with their health to a certain extent. For many people, it's a relatively low-risk proposition (though no one enjoys the vomiting and diarrhea that might ensue from a foodborne bug).

But if you're immunocompromised, however, the equation changes. Your odds of developing foodborne illness can be higher, because your body is less likely to successfully fight off pathogens in contaminated foods. You're also more apt to develop dangerous complications, like [severe dehydration](#).

If you're immunocompromised because you have an autoimmune disease, are undergoing chemotherapy, or are an organ transplant recipient, food safety should be a top priority year-round.

But now that we're in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic, new questions about how to safely obtain, prepare, and consume food are arising. Here are some key facts you should know.

1. You probably won't get COVID-19 from eating contaminated food, but it's smart to take some precautions

While some viruses, like [rotavirus and norovirus](#), may be spread via certain types of food, so far there is no evidence at this time that COVID-19 is being passed from one person to another through food. "Food has not been found to be a transmission vector," says Tamika Sims, PhD, director of food technology communications at the International Food Information Council.

That said, this coronavirus appears to be able to survive on some surfaces for hours or even days. For that reason, it's a good idea to regularly disinfect commonly touched kitchen surfaces like countertops and refrigerator, microwave, and oven door handles. It is also theoretically possible (though it hasn't been proven) that you could get coronavirus from eating raw fruits and vegetables that were contaminated by someone who has the virus.

"If you're using fresh produce, wash it thoroughly," Dr. Sims advises.

2. Hot foods are safer than cold/room temperature ones

Heat destroys COVID-19, so cooking foods thoroughly and reheating takeout and leftovers should offer some additional protection. The French Agency for Food, Environmental, and Occupational Health & Safety has reported that heating food to [145°F for at least four minutes](#) should do the trick.

To kill a variety of harmful germs, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services always recommends cooking foods like steak, fish, and pork until they

reach the appropriate [internal temperature](#); poultry and leftovers should get even hotter (165°F).



3. Getting food delivered is safer than eating in restaurants

There's still some risk involved, since you're trusting someone else to prepare your food and use safe handling practices, just as you would be if you ate in a restaurant, notes Dr. Sims. "However, having food delivered does minimize person-to-person contact, which is helpful for decreasing the transfer of germs." If you decide to order in, move the food out of takeout containers and onto your own plates, [discard the packaging it came in](#), and wash your hands thoroughly before digging in.

4. If possible, get groceries delivered rather than venturing into stores.

The most common way people get COVID-19 is through close contact with others who are infected. "Going into a crowded grocery store may not be the best idea if you're high-risk [due to being immunocompromised], because you could come into close contact with a person who could be sick," says Dr. Sims.

The safest way to get groceries is to have them delivered to your home or use a curbside pickup option at a store. If those aren't options for you, see if you can get a friend or family member who is not high risk to shop for you. Throw out boxes and bags that your groceries arrive in, then wash your hands before putting food away and clean your countertops thoroughly afterward.

As a last resort, plan to shop at off-peak hours when the store is less likely to be crowded. Dr. Sims also recommends seeking out smaller, less crowded markets instead of visiting mega supermarkets or wholesale clubs, which tend to be teeming with people. [Wipe down your cart or basket with a disinfectant wipe](#) before you start shopping, use hand sanitizer as soon as you leave the store, and wash your hands thoroughly when you get home.

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