



NEWS RELEASE

Defense Commissary Agency

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Food safety month

Commissaries reinforce customers' awareness
of foodborne illnesses during September

*By Kevin L. Robinson,
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Note: To read this release online, go to the [DeCA website](http://www.commissaries.com).

FORT LEE, Va. – Although the COVID-19 pandemic has upped our public safety awareness, consumers cannot afford to lose track of the

precautions recommended to help protect against foodborne illnesses.

That's the message the Defense Commissary Agency is reinforcing as it observes [Food Safety Education Month](#) in September, joining the Centers for Disease Control, the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Food Safety Inspection Service, the Department of Health and Human Services and other organizations.

“Of course, we want our customers to be vigilant in guarding against the spread of COVID-19. However, we also need to remain aware of those foodborne illnesses such as E. coli



and salmonella that can also be potentially harmful, even deadly,” said Army Lt. Col. Angela M. Parham, director of DeCA’s Public Health and Safety. “So it’s important that we continue paying attention to the basics of foodborne illness prevention.”

Every year, foodborne illnesses strike an estimated 48 million Americans, resulting in 3,000 deaths and nearly 130,000 hospitalizations, according to the CDC. That’s why military veterinarians and store food safety specialists inspect food sources, deliveries and products on the commissary shelves.

However, that’s only half the fight, Parham said. Commissary customers have a responsibility to protect their families and themselves from food borne illnesses and it starts the moment they exit the store.

[Bacteria and viruses](#) remain the leading causes of food poisoning, according to FoodSafety.gov. Thanks to awareness campaigns from the CDC and USDA, such as “Be Food Safe,” commissary customers have the guidelines they need to help lower the risk of foodborne illnesses when they leave the store.

The “Be Food Safe” message is the basis for the following safe handling techniques:

Clean

- Wash hands with warm soapy water for 20 seconds before and after handling raw meat, poultry or seafood.
- Wash utensils, cutting boards, dishes and countertops with hot soapy water after preparing each food item and before you go on to prepare the next item.
- Food contact surfaces can be sanitized with a freshly made solution of 1 tablespoon of unscented, liquid chlorine bleach in 1 gallon of water.

Separate

- Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from other foods in your grocery shopping cart and in your refrigerator.
- If possible, use one cutting board for fresh produce and a separate one for raw meat, poultry and seafood.
- Never place cooked food or foods that are eaten raw, like salads, on a plate that previously held raw meat, poultry or seafood.

Cook

- Cook meats to a safe minimum internal temperature as measured with a food thermometer – 145F for pork, 155F for beef, and 165F for poultry products and all ground or cubed meats.

Chill

- Chill food promptly and properly. Refrigerate or freeze perishables, prepared foods and leftovers within two hours (or one hour if temperatures are above 90 F).

Parham reminds commissary shoppers to bring a cooler during a long trip to and from the store to help maintain proper food temperatures.

“The trip home can end up being a source of foodborne illness if you’re not careful,” Parham said. “Also, don’t forget to wash your hands before, during and after handling food – that will help prevent a lot of problems.”

A few more tips for handling food safely can be found at www.homefoodsafety.org:

- Use hand sanitizer to wipe hands and the handle of the shopping cart.
- Clean hands before sampling food. Either bring moist towelettes or carry a bottle of hand sanitizer to use before you taste.
- If you use [reusable grocery bags](#), wash them often.
- Check food packages for holes, tears or openings. Frozen foods should be solid with no signs of [thawing](#).
- Check for a loose lid on jars whose seals seem tampered with or damaged. Report a defective cap to the store manager.
- Avoid buying cans that are deeply dented, bulging, rusting or have a dent on either the top or side seam.
- Use plastic bags to separate raw meat, poultry and seafood before placing them in your cart to avoid contaminating ready-to-eat foods like bread or produce.
- When shopping, select perishable foods last before checkout and group them together.
- Take groceries home immediately and store them right away. If on an extended trip, bring a cooler with chill packs for perishable foods. Perishable foods must be refrigerated within two hours and only one hour if it is over 90 F outside.
- Keep perishable foods out of the hot trunk in summer and place in the air-conditioned car instead.

The DeCA website is a good resource for [food safety](#). To find the latest food safety alerts and product recalls affecting military commissaries, visit the [News Room](#) on commissaries.com and select the box that says “Food Recall.”

For more on food safety awareness, go to the [CDC website](#). Information on food handling techniques is also available at [Eatright.org](#).

About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Commissaries provide a military benefit, saving authorized patrons thousands of dollars annually on their purchases compared to similar products at commercial retailers. The discounted prices include a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*

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