



Seafood Health Facts: Making Smart choices

Balancing the Benefits and Risks of Seafood Consumption

Resources for Healthcare Providers and Consumers

Ready-to-Eat Seafood Products [1]

This section describes food safety issues associated with ready-to-eat food that will not be cooked before they are eaten. Common ready-to-eat seafood products include smoked fish, seafood salads, pre-cooked products, surimi, sushi and sashimi. Information on how to select and handle these products to avoid foodborne illness is provided.

Introduction

Products that may not be fully cooked before they are eaten are often called Ready-to-Eat or RTE food products. These products can be made from all of the major high protein perishable foods including meat, poultry, dairy and seafood. RTE foods must be refrigerated properly to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria that could cause food borne illness and they must be handled properly during storage, preparation and serving.

Examples of RTE seafood products that must be refrigerated and may not be cooked before they are eaten include:

Sushi or sashimi	Smoked seafood	Seafood salads or dips
Cooked shrimp, crab or lobster meat	Pasteurized seafood	Pickled seafood
Ceviche or raw marinated seafood	Dried seafood	Seafood sandwiches

Proper Handling Is Important

The key to handling these foods safely is to keep them cold and get them home as quickly as possible, keep them refrigerated, prevent contamination during storage, preparation, and serving, and limit the amount of time that they are exposed to room temperature. Safe handling tips include:

Keep It Cold!

Keep RTE seafood products below 40°F. Pick up RTE seafood last during a shopping trip and transport it home in a cooler or other insulated container with ice or gel packs. Check the temperature of your refrigerator with a thermometer to make sure it is below 40°F. Thaw frozen products in the refrigerator. If the RTE seafood is going to be exposed to room temperature for more than an hour or two, serve it on ice.

Keep It Clean!

Make sure that raw foods don't drip, splash or touch RTE foods when transporting them home or while storing them in the refrigerator. Store them in sealed plastic bags or containers if necessary. Use a clean cutting board and utensils when preparing them for serving, and clean serving dishes, trays or platters.

Use RTE Foods as Soon as Possible! Don't use products that have exceeded a "Use By" or other date that is designed to indicate its predicted shelf life. When in doubt, cook the product thoroughly before using it or throw it out.

Use Caution When Serving These Products to Some Individuals

Some people may be at increased risk for serious complications when exposed to certain kinds of bacteria that can cause food borne illness. High risk individuals include those who may have a compromised or weak

immune system because of health conditions such as liver disease, cancer or chemotherapy patients, HIV infection, stomach or intestinal problems, and certain groups such as the elderly, pregnant women and young children. These individuals should use caution and consider whether or not they should eat RTE foods unless they are cooked properly before consumption. Pregnant women should use special caution because of potential severe risks to themselves and their unborn baby that are associated with a type of bacteria called *Listeria* that could be present in some RTE food products.

[Click Here](#) [2] to view the Food and Drug Administration publication, **Special Handling for Ready-to-Eat, Refrigerated Foods To Reduce the Risks of Foodborne Listeria**



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