Cooking to Proper Temperatures in Microwave Ovens

Today, microwave ovens are found in 90 percent of American kitchens. Because so many households use microwave ovens daily to prepare foods, it is important to know some cooking basics to ensure food safety. As with all cooking methods, the only way to ensure that food is cooked to the correct temperature is to use a food thermometer.

How to Know When Food is Fully Cooked and Safe to Eat

Microwave ovens are used to reheat leftovers, cook food and to defrost frozen foods. Regardless of whether you are cooking a food for the first time or reheating leftovers, be sure to use a food thermometer in several places to verify the internal temperature, as it is the best way to ensure the food is hot enough to destroy any harmful bacteria that may be present. For example, frozen meals should not be eaten (even a bite or two) until they are cooked thoroughly.

When cooking prepared food in the microwave, follow the cooking instructions on the package closely as these steps are all important to ensure food safety. Frequently, the cooking instructions will include:

- **Stir Step.** Stirring food midway through the microwaving time promotes even cooking and helps to eliminate possible cold spots where harmful bacteria can survive.
- **Stand or Rest Step.** Allowing the food to “rest” or “stand” allows for the cooking time to be completed. During this time, the temperature of the food can rise several degrees.

**Recommended internal temperature.**

A common guide is to reach an internal temperature of 165°F. To test the temperature of the meal, start by placing the tip of a food thermometer in the thickest part of the food you are preparing to eat. Be sure to take the temperature in several locations. Temperatures within the food may vary because microwaves may not heat evenly.