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Hot Dogs and Food Safety

Whether you call it a frankfurter, hot dog, wiener, or bologna, it's a cooked sausage and a year-round favorite. They can be made from beef, pork, turkey, chicken, or a combination — the label must state which. And there are Federal standards of identity for their content.

Definitions

Frankfurters (a.k.a., hot dogs, wieners, or bologna) are cooked and/or smoked sausages according to the Federal standards of identity. Federal standards of identity describe the requirements for processors to follow in formulating and marketing meat, poultry, and egg products produced in the United States for sale in this country and in foreign commerce. The standard also requires that they be comminuted (reduced to minute particles), semisolid products made from one or more kinds of raw skeletal muscle from livestock (like beef or pork), and may contain poultry meat. Smoking and curing ingredients contribute to flavor, color, and preservation of the product. They are link-shaped and come in all sizes — short, long, thin, and chubby.

The most popular of all categories, the skinless varieties, have been stripped of their casings after cooking. Water or ice, or both, may be used to facilitate chopping or mixing or to dissolve curing ingredients. The finished products may not contain more than 30% fat or no more than 10% water, or a combination of 40% fat and added water. Up to 3.5% non-meat binders and extenders (such as nonfat dry milk, cereal, or dried whole milk) or 2% isolated soy protein may be used, but must be shown in the ingredients statement on the product's label by its common name.

Food Safety Guidelines

The same general food safety guidelines apply to hot dogs as to all perishable products — “Keep hot food hot and cold food cold.”

When you leave the grocery store with hot dogs, head straight home and refrigerate or freeze them immediately. If there is no product date, hot dogs can be safely stored in the unopened package for 2 weeks in the refrigerator; once opened, only 1 week. For maximum quality, freeze hot dogs no longer than 1 or 2 months. And, of course, never leave hot dogs at room temperature for more than 2 hours and no more than 1 hour when the temperature goes above 90 °F.

Although hot dogs are fully cooked, those at increased risk of foodborne illness should reheat hot dogs and luncheon meat until steaming hot before eating, due to the threat of *listeriosis*.

Listeria monocytogenes, the bacteria that cause listeriosis, can be found in the intestinal tracts of humans and animals, and in milk, soil, and leaf vegetables. The bacteria can grow slowly at refrigerator temperatures. *Listeria monocytogenes* can be in ready-to-eat foods such as hot dogs, luncheon meats, cold cuts, fermented or dry sausage, and other deli-style meat and poultry, soft cheeses and unpasteurized milk. Symptoms of listeriosis include fever, chills, headache, backache, an upset stomach, abdominal pain, and diarrhea. Persons who have ingested the bacteria

may take up to 3 weeks to become ill. At-risk persons (pregnant women and newborns, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems) may later develop more serious illnesses. *Listeria monocytogenes* can also cause miscarriages.

Cut Hot Dogs before Giving them to Children

For children younger than 4, whole hot dogs and other round foods can be a choking hazard. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that to prevent choking, cut hot dogs lengthwise or into very small pieces before giving them to children. If the hot dogs have a casing, remove it before cutting the hot dog into pieces for the child.

Food Product Dating Terms

The labeling on a package of hot dogs may contain one of several different types of dates. Product dating is voluntary and not required by Federal regulations. If a date is used, it must also state what the date means.

- **“Sell-By”** date tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.
- **“Use-By”** date is the last date recommended for use of the product while at peak quality. This date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product.
- **“Best if Used By (or Before)”** date helps consumers by stating a precise date for best flavor or quality.
- **“Expiration Date”** helps stores and consumers by stating the shelf-life or the last day product should be used while it is wholesome.

Safety After Date Expires

Except for “Use-By” dates, product dates don’t refer to home storage and use after purchase. If a “Sell-By,” “Best if Used By (or Before),” or “Expiration Date” date expires during home storage, a product should be safe and wholesome if handled safely and kept refrigerated (at 40 °F or below) or frozen (0 °F or below).

Casings

Some hot dogs have a casing, or a thin skin. If the species of the casing is different than that of the hot dog, the label must say so. For example, if a turkey hot dog has a pork casing, the label must list the pork casing on the ingredients list. If the casing is artificially colored, the label must indicate this as well.

Byproducts, Variety Meats

“Frankfurter, Hot Dog, Wiener, or Bologna With Byproducts” or “With Variety Meats” are made according to the specifications for cooked and/or smoked sausages (see above), except they consist of not less than 15% of one or more kinds of raw skeletal muscle meat with raw meat byproducts. The byproducts (heart, kidney, or liver, for example) must be named with the derived species and be individually named in the ingredients statement.

Species

Beef Franks or Pork Franks are cooked and/or smoked sausage products made according to the specifications above, but with meat from a single species and do not include byproducts.

Turkey Franks or Chicken Franks can contain turkey or chicken and turkey or chicken skin and fat in proportion to a turkey or chicken carcass.

Ingredients Statement

All ingredients in the product must be listed in the ingredients statement in order of predominance, from highest to lowest amounts.

“Meat” Derived By Advanced Meat Bone Separation and Meat Recovery Systems

The definition of “meat” was amended in December 1994 to include any “meat” product that is produced by advanced meat/bone separation machinery. This meat is comparable in appearance, texture, and composition to meat trimmings and similar meat products derived by hand. This machinery separates meat from bone by scraping, shaving, or pressing the meat from the bone without breaking or grinding the bone. Product produced by advanced meat recovery (AMR) machinery can be

labeled using terms associated with hand-deboned product (e.g., “pork trimmings” and “ground pork”).

The AMR machinery cannot grind, crush, or pulverize bones to remove edible meat tissue, and bones must emerge essentially intact. The meat produced in this manner can contain no more than 150 milligrams (mg) of calcium per 100 grams product (within a tolerance of 30 mg. of calcium). Products that exceed the calcium content limit must be labeled “mechanically separated pork” in the ingredients statement.

Mechanically Separated Meat (MSM)

Mechanically separated meat is a paste-like and batter-like meat product produced by forcing bones, with attached edible meat, under high pressure through a sieve or similar device to separate the bone from the edible meat tissue.

In 1982, a final rule published by FSIS on mechanically separated meat said it was safe and established a standard of identity for the food product. Some restrictions were made on how much can be used and the type of products in which it can be used. These restrictions were based on concerns for limited intake of certain components in MSM, like calcium. **Due to FSIS regulations enacted in 2004 to protect consumers against Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy, mechanically separated beef is considered inedible and is prohibited for use as human food. It is not permitted in hot dogs or any other processed product.** Mechanically separated pork is permitted and must be labeled as “mechanically separated pork” in the ingredients statement. Hot dogs can contain no more than 20% mechanically separated pork.

Mechanically Separated Poultry (MSP)

Mechanically separated poultry is a paste-like and batter-like poultry product produced by forcing bones, with attached edible tissue, through a sieve or similar device under high pressure to separate bone from the edible tissue. Mechanically separated poultry has been used in poultry products since the late 1960’s. In 1995, a final rule on mechanically separated poultry said it was safe and could be used without restrictions. However, it must be labeled as “mechanically separated chicken or turkey” in the product’s ingredients statement. The final rule became effective November 4, 1996. Hot dogs can contain any amount of mechanically separated chicken or turkey.

Food Safety Questions?

Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline

If you have a question about meat, poultry, or egg products, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll free at **1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)**; TTY: 1-800-256-7072.



The Hotline is open year-round Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day. Check out the FSIS Web site at www.fsis.usda.gov.

Send E-mail questions to MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov.

Ask Karen!

FSIS’ automated response system can provide food safety information 24/7 and a live chat during Hotline hours.



AskKaren.gov