

Safe Meat Cooking Temperatures Lowered

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In a May, 2011, news release, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that their research has shown that pork cooked to a lower temperature and held for a specified amount of time results in as safe a product as with a previously higher recommended cooking temperature. This new recommendation also means that there are fewer numbers to remember when cooking meats safely.

USDA now says that pork steaks, roasts and chops should be cooked to 145°F, the same recommendation as for all other whole red meats, including beef, veal and lamb. The temperature should be measured using a meat thermometer, inserting the part of the thermometer that registers the temperature into the thickest part of the meat.

With the new lower temperature comes a new requirement, one that is easy to comply with. Once the pork or whole red meat reaches the internal temperature of 145°F, it should “rest” for three minutes. This is accomplished by removing the meat from the grill, oven or stove and letting it sit. During this time, the temperature of the meat stays constant or it may continue to rise. Researchers at USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service have found that this process results in the same safe product as bringing the internal temperature to 160°F with no rest time, as was previously recommended. Either way, the meat has reached the temperature and time needed to destroy any illness-causing microorganisms that may be present on the meat.

Because ground meat has greater surface area and is more exposed to contamination during processing, the recommended safe cooking temperature for ground beef, lamb or pork remains at 160°F. All poultry, whether turkey or chicken, whether whole, parts or ground, should be cooked to an internal temperature, measured by a food thermometer, of 165°F. Neither ground meat nor poultry require a rest time after reaching their safe temperature.

So it all boils down to three numbers, easy to remember: cook whole meats to 145°F (with a three minute rest time), ground meat to 160°F, and poultry to 165°F.

For more information on the latest recommendations, go to the [Food Safety and Inspection Service](#) web site or contact me, or your local University of Missouri Extension office.

(Written June 17, 2011)