



NEWS RELEASE

Defense Commissary Agency

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Keep those leftover meals safe to eat

*By Kevin L. Robinson,
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FORT LEE, Va. – Commissary customers are saving more money by cooking their own meals at home and munching on the leftovers for days after that initial meal. But there are limits to a good thing.

As part of its Food Safety Awareness campaign in April, the Defense Commissary Agency is advising customers to monitor how long they keep food in their refrigerators to ensure the items are safe to eat.

“Food Safety at home revolves around keeping storage areas such as the refrigerator clean and using, freezing or disposing of leftover foods that have been held chilled for two to three days,” said Col. David R. Schuckenbrock, DeCA’s director of health and safety. “Most items don’t hold up well and begin to spoil if held longer chilled. Without good rotation practices, finding a snack in the refrigerator becomes an adventure with unintended health risks.”

Checking those leftovers is part of the “Be Food Safe” campaign developed by the Partnership for Food Safety Education to promote proper food handling techniques at home – **clean** cooking areas, **separate** foods that may cross contaminate, **cook** food thoroughly and **chill** leftover food at the right temperature.

With more food being tucked into refrigerators after meals, DeCA’s food safety officials want commissary customers to remember the following tips on storing and heating leftovers:

- Wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds before and after handling food.

- Refrigerate cooked leftovers promptly – within two hours. Use an appliance thermometer to ensure your refrigerator is at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below.
- Divide leftovers into smaller portions and store in shallow containers in the refrigerator.
- Reheat cooked leftovers to 165 F as measured with a food thermometer.
- When microwaving leftovers, make sure there are no cold spots in the food (where bacteria can survive). Cover food, stir and rotate for even cooking. If the microwave has no turntable, rotate the dish by hand once or twice during cooking.

“Our customers can count on the commissary to be a safe food source, but we cannot safeguard their food once it leaves the store,” said DeCA Director and CEO Philip E. Sakowitz Jr. “By following these guidelines for handling refrigerated leftover food, our customers can protect themselves from the bacteria that can make them sick.”

For more information on food safety, go to the DeCA Web site at <http://www.commissaries.com> and click on the Food Safety section to access links to various consumer safety sites. The DeCA Web site is also a good source to find out about any recalls affecting products sold in commissaries. For more information on Be Food Safe, go to <http://www.befoodsafe.org/>.

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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. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$3,400 annually for a family of four. 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.*