Every year, nearly 48 million people in the United States—1 in 6—get sick from eating food contaminated with germs. While *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter* and *Norovirus* cause the most illnesses, *Listeria monocytogenes* is a less-common but often deadly foodborne bacteria.

Safe food handling is especially important for older adults, pregnant women and persons with immune-compromising conditions. Almost all cases of listeriosis occur among these three groups.

**Below, you’ll find useful information** to help you discuss with consumers the importance of maintaining a refrigerator temperature of 40 °F or below to reduce the risks of foodborne illness at home.

### High-Risk Groups

**OLDER ADULTS:** After age 75, many adults have weakened immune systems, increasing the risk of contracting foodborne illness.

**MOTHERS-TO-BE:** Pregnant women are 10 times more likely to contract listeriosis than other healthy adults.

### Thermometers Are Important

**THE FACT:** Refrigerator thermometers are tools that stay in the refrigerator and display the actual temps (separate from temperature control dial).

**THE SCIENCE:**
- Almost half (43%) of observed homes had a refrigerator that was too warm (>41 °F)\(^1\)
- Just 4–9% of domestic refrigerators were observed to have a thermometer (that tells the temperature in degrees).\(^1, 2\)
- Bacteria that can cause illness grow rapidly in the “danger zone” between 40 °F and 140 °F.
- The predicted number of cases of listeriosis would be reduced by more than 70% if all home refrigerator temperatures stayed at 40 °F or below.\(^3\)

**THE ACTIONS:**
- Keep home refrigerator at or below 40 °F as measured with a thermometer.
- See Go 40 °F or Below brochures for more on the importance of refrigeration to food safety.

### Storing Food

**THE FACT:** Proper storing of food in a refrigerator at 40 °F or below helps to reduce the risk of food poisoning.

**THE SCIENCE:**
- Compared to other food-handling behaviors, consumers consider adhering to recommended time/temperature for food storage as least likely to contribute to risk of illness.
- 25% of people surveyed said they had stored refrigerated leftovers for 4 days or longer.\(^4\)
- Up to 99% of consumers observed stored raw meat, fish or poultry above or next to ready-to-eat foods.\(^5\)

**THE ACTIONS:**
- To prevent cross-contamination, foods should be completely covered and securely wrapped in the refrigerator.
- Consume or freeze refrigerated leftovers within 3-4 days. Toss after 4 days.
- See Go 40 °F or Below brochures for more consumer food storage safety tips.

The CDC estimates that listeriosis causes about 1,600 illnesses and 260 deaths in the U.S. annually.
THE FACT:
Thawing and marinating foods in the refrigerator is the safest way.

THE SCIENCE:
- 50–65% of consumers thaw raw meat, fish or poultry incorrectly (at room temperature and/or in stagnant water).  
- On average, consumers thaw raw meat at room temperature for 5 hours.

THE ACTIONS:
- According to the USDA, planning ahead for safe thawing is key. Even small foods can take up to a day to thaw in the refrigerator.
- See Go 40 °F or Below brochures for smart thawing tips.

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In observational research, average home refrigerator temperature was > 40 °F in:

9% OF TOP SHELVES

21% OF BOTTOM SHELVES

55% OF REFRIGERATOR DOORS

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THE FACT:
Frequent refrigerator cleaning and sanitizing can help to minimize the likelihood of bacterial cross-contamination.

THE SCIENCE:
- 12% of consumers report cleaning their refrigerators once a year or less.
- 34% of consumers report cleaning their refrigerators only 2–3 times per year.
- Consumers report cleaning their fridges with substances that do not adequately clean/sanitize, including:
  - 2–14% plain water
  - 10% vinegar
  - 16–35% baking soda

THE ACTIONS:
- Regularly clean the inside walls and shelves. Sanitize surfaces and bins in your refrigerator using a spray solution of one tablespoon liquid chlorine bleach to one gallon of hot water.
- See Go 40 °F or Below brochures for smart cleaning tips.

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3 USDA/FDA joint risk assessment September, 2003
4 Personal communication: S Godwin in-person survey of 551 respondents
5 P. Borrusso: results compiled from 23 studies that investigated consumer knowledge, attitudes and behavior.

For more information, visit fightbac.org.