

# HAM SAFETY AND STORAGE



Ham may be fresh, cured, or cured-and-smoked. They can be cook-before-eating, cooked or ready-to-eat, plastic-wrapped, canned and country types. Ham is defined as the meat from the leg or shoulder of the pig. There are many kinds. Their storage times and cooking times can be quite confusing. This background information will give you the facts and make them easier to understand.

## Purchasing

When purchasing a ham, read the directions carefully. The label will tell you if the ham is cured or smoked, or if it is “fully cooked and needs to be refrigerated. Fresh ham will bear the term “fresh” as part of the product name and is an indication that the product is not cured. Hams that are not ready-to-eat, but have the appearance of ready to eat, will bear a prominent statement on the label panel indicating the need for cooking, such as “cook thoroughly”. In addition the label must bear cooking instructions.

## Preparation

Set oven temperature to 325° F. Both cook-before-eating cured and fresh hams should be cooked to an internal temperature of at least 160° F. Hams labeled “fully cooked” can be served cold or reheated to an internal temperature of 140° F.

## Storage

Both plastic-wrapped and vacuum-packaged hams must be refrigerated. A plastic-wrapped ham will keep about one week. A vacuum-packaged ham should be consumed by the “use by” date or within 1 week after the “sell by” date. Both plastic-wrapped and vacuum-packaged hams can be frozen. To preserve texture and flavor in the freezer, wrap the ham tightly in an extra layer of freezer paper or plastic and use within 2 months.

Canned hams labeled “keep refrigerated” require refrigeration and, unopened, will keep 6 to 9 months in the refrigerator. Once canned hams are opened, keep them refrigerated and use within 3 to 5 days. Make sure the can isn’t showing any bulges, cracks, dents or rust, or leaking any liquid. A canned ham should not be frozen. Shelf-stable canned hams do not require refrigeration and may be stored in a cool, dry place for 2 to 5 years.

Country style hams are dry-cured with salt and aged for distinctive flavor; some are also smoked. Unopened country style hams can be kept up to 1 year without refrigeration. Once the ham is cut, exposing the moist interior, it must be stored in the refrigerator. After the ham has been soaked, or soaked and cooked, it should be used within 5 days.

## References

USDA 2007. Fact Sheet: Ham and Food Safety. [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact\\_Sheets/ham/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/ham/index.asp)

U.S. Food and Drug Administration Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. Refrigerator & Freezer Storage Chart. <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fttstore.html>. September 2006.

USDA 2007. Fact Sheet: Keep Food Safe! Food Safety Basics. [http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact\\_Sheets/Keep\\_Food\\_Safe\\_Food\\_Safety\\_Basics/index.asp](http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Fact_Sheets/Keep_Food_Safe_Food_Safety_Basics/index.asp)

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