

Myth:

“Irradiated poop won’t make you sick, but it’s still poop.”

Reality:

This statement is correct. Using the irradiation process does not increase nor decrease the amount of poop that a food product may already contain.

Some pathogenic bacteria such as E.coli O157:H7 are “fecal bacteria”. Bacteria that like to live in fecal matter. Irradiation is very effective at eliminating these bacteria as well as other pathogens.

This Myth is specific to irradiating meat and poultry products to minimize the risk of food-borne disease from various pathogens including fecal bacteria. It is based on the erroneous concept that since irradiation can eliminate bacterial dangers, then (existing) sanitary measures need not, and will not, be followed. It assumes that meat processors will run dirty operations and will not try to minimize contamination of the final product.

Although the Myth is correct, the underlying presumption that irradiation will replace sanitation is false.

Irradiation is not a replacement for sanitation. Irradiation is a component of sanitation. In practice it is an additional “kill step” assuring that any bacteria that may have passed through existing sanitary procedures will be eliminated and not cause harm. Using irradiation does not reduce or eliminate the other sanitation controls that are required through regulation.

The most common “kill step” used is heat through cooking or pasteurization. Just like irradiation, heat does not increase nor decrease the amount of poop that a food product may already contain. Should heat pasteurization not be used because it does not remove poop? The same can be asked of high pressure processing...albeit compressed poop.

No one wants poop in his or her food. However, should any trace amounts of fecal bacteria make it through the process, most people prefer irradiated and/or cooked poop.

When I purchase irradiated meat, I know that the processor has taken an extra step to assure my safety. A processor who is willing to take this extra step is more likely to maintain a very sanitary production line.

