

# Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

## Ham probably cooked, but read the label

**We're having ham for Christmas dinner this year. I believe ham is already cooked, but when I was growing up, I remember my mother always put a glaze on it and baked it in the oven for several hours. Do I have to do that, or can I just warm it up before serving?**

Most ham sold in the U.S. is cured and fully cooked, but even in that case, it can still take several hours to warm in the oven. At 325 degrees F, a 6-pound bone-in cooked smoked ham would take nearly 2.5 hours to heat to an internal temperature of 140 degrees. That's the temperature recommended for reheating most precooked ham sold in the U.S.

But be forewarned: There are many different types of ham. Your best bet is to always follow the preparation guidelines on the label. Some types of ham might have all the looks and appearances of being ready-to-eat, but aren't. In that case, the label will prominently say "Cook thoroughly" or something similar and will have cooking instructions. You don't want to miss that.

Most products labeled as "ham" come from the hind leg of a hog, anywhere from the middle of the shank bone (that's the round leg bone you might see — and have to cut around — in some hams) up to the hip bone, which is called the "aitch" on hogs and cattle. The upper part, the butt end (which is exactly what you think it is), has more fat and so it's often thought of as more flavorful.

If you find yourself with a "picnic ham," you're really eating pork shoulder that's been cured so it tastes much like regular ham. If you ever buy a whole hog for the freezer, you'll get two whole fresh hams, which is ham meat that hasn't been cured and is more like pork than traditional ham. And, of course, you might also see turkey ham at the store, which



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is a bird of another feather altogether.

Most ham sold in the U.S. is "city ham," which is wet-cured with brine and often smoked or injected with smoke flavoring. Cooking may occur during this process, but, again, it's important to check the label. Country ham, on the other hand, is dry-cured with salt, then is hung to dry for several months and often smoked as well. Country ham is much saltier than city ham and requires soaking in water for hours to let some of the salt leach out before cooking.

A spiral-sliced ham is safe to eat without reheating. If you do want to serve it warm, be careful not to dry it out. Cover it with heavy foil and heat it at 325 degrees for about 10 minutes a pound, until it reaches 140 F. Leftovers, or spiral ham that has been repackaged outside of the original facility, should be heated to 165 degrees F.

A boneless ham is a product that undergoes more processing than other types of ham. It is made by chopping or sectioning the meat into smaller pieces, and, like other types of processed meat, it is tumbled and massaged to allow the pieces to stick together in a particular shape.

Any ham that's not ready-to-eat needs to be cooked to reach at least 145 degrees F internal temperature, and allowed to rest at least three minutes before cutting and serving.

For more details, go to [fsis.usda.gov](http://fsis.usda.gov) and search for "Ham and Food Safety."

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**Editor:** This column was reviewed by Sanja Ilic, specialist in Food Safety for Ohio State University Extension.

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