Just because that chicken has already thawed without being cooked doesn't mean it needs to be thrown out.

Contrary to popular belief, thawed food can be refrozen in some cases, said Julie Albrecht, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension food specialist. Food thawed in the refrigerator is safe to move back to the freezer, Albrecht said.

On the other hand, foods thawed in cool water or the microwave are susceptible to bacteria and should be cooked immediately. Even more dangerous is leaving food to thaw on the kitchen counter because microorganisms grow between 40 and 140 degrees.

"The inside could still be frozen, but you're encouraging microorganism growth on the outside," she said.

Re-freezing food is the subject of one of four food safety myths from the Partnership for Food Safety Education (http://fightbac.org).

Another of the myths they address says that bagged lettuce should be washed to rid it of bacteria. However, packaged greens labeled "ready-to-eat" or "washed" have already been cleaned and rinsing them actually can expose them to contamination.

"They've already been cleaned," Albrecht said. "And you're giving them one more handling."

In the case of pre-washed greens, it's enough to use clean cutting boards, utensils and counter tops.

Another myth is that microwaves kill the bacteria in food. In reality, the microwaves don't kill bacteria; the heat does. Microwave ovens cook food unevenly, leaving cold spots and the risk of foodborne illness.

Following package instructions carefully and checking microwaved food with a food thermometer can prevent these illnesses, Albrecht said. Microwaves only kill bacteria when the food is heated to a safe temperature. Ground meat is done at 160 degrees, poultry at 165 and fish at 145. Steaks should be cooked to a minimum of 145 degrees, according to the PFSE website.

"In fact, it's important to check all food with a food thermometer before eating it," Albrecht said.

The final myth is that looking at food or checking the temperature with a finger can indicate its doneness.

"Some hamburgers look like they're done when they're not done," Albrecht said. "You have to make sure to kill microorganisms and not look for whether it's not pink inside, or juices are clear."

Again, using a food thermometer is the only way to know for sure that food is cooked properly. Even if the outside appears done, the inside may still have cold spots, which can't be detected by appearance or touch and might contain bacteria.

Food thermometers should be cleaned with soap and water after each use.