



Environmental Health Information Sheet: Keeping Your Food Safe

Introduction

When working in a commercial kitchen or even when preparing food for friends or family at home, it is important to keep your food safe from bacteria which can make you sick. There are a number of factors which must be considered such as temperature, cross contamination and hand washing which can make the difference between safe and unsafe food. Please take the time to read this document as it could save you, your customers or your family from getting sick.

Washing Your Hands

Even if your hands look clean it doesn't mean they are. Bacteria that could make you sick are much smaller than you can see, and they can hide in the cracks of your skin, and under your fingernails. It is very important to wash your hands regularly such as;

- When you first enter the kitchen
- After going to the toilet
- After blowing your nose
- After handling money
- Before preparing any salads or other ready to eat foods
- After cutting up or handling raw meats
- After holding or patting your pets
- Before eating your meal

There is no correct or incorrect hand washing technique, however you should wash your hands under hot water, using liquid hand soap, and scrubbing thoroughly to build up a good lather to wash the bacteria away. You may have to use a nail brush if you have dirt under your finger nails or you have been handling raw meats. Remember that when drying your hands you should use a single use towel, so that you don't recontaminate your clean hands.

Cross-contamination

Cross contamination occurs when bacteria or viruses are transmitted from one surface to another such as from a dirty knife to an item of food. This contamination can come from people, work surfaces, utensils, equipment or other food. If the food is raw meat, it will be cooked and this will destroy most bacteria – but not all pathogens are destroyed through cooking. When contamination occurs on ready to eat foods such as salads this poses the greatest risk, because there will be no cooking to kill the bacteria.



The most common cause of cross contamination is from people forgetting to wash their hands. Other causes of contamination are such things as knives, chopping boards or other cooking implements that are used for preparing raw meats and then used to prepare ready to eat foods, without washing in between. Incorrectly storing foods can also cause cross-contamination, such as leaving meat in the fridge, allowing the blood and other juices to drip onto the other foods.

Follow these simple rules to help prevent contamination:

- Wash your hands regularly
- Wash and sanitise all chopping boards and cooking utensils after each use
- Store raw meats in ridged sealed containers on the lower shelves in the fridge
- All foods in the fridge should be covered at all times- separate raw and cooked
- Try colour coding chopping boards such as red for meats and green for salads
- Discard chopping boards and plastic utensils when they become overly scratched as bacteria can hide in these scratches
- Clean and sanitise all food contact surfaces regularly – bench tops, shelving, fridges and freezers

The Temperature Danger Zone

The temperature that food is stored at can make the difference between keeping the food safe from bacteria, or making someone sick. It is very important to *always* keep food under temperature control especially potentially hazardous foods such as:

- Cooked meats or foods containing meats – for example deli meats, chicken, curries, pâté, meat pies, lasagne etc
- All raw meats
- Seafoods or foods containing seafood – for example shell fish, fish cakes, seafood salads etc
- Dairy products – for example milk, cheese, cream, yogurt etc
- Pre prepared fruits and vegetables – salads, fruit salads, cooked vegetables, sprouts etc
- Cooked rice and pasta
- Gravies, mayonnaise and sauces
- Sandwiches and rolls containing any of the above items

Cold foods must be stored below 4°C. Keep a thermometer in your fridge so you know if your fridge can get down to this temperature. If it can't you may need to get it repaired or replace it. Don't overstock your fridge; there must be space around the food for proper air-flow. If you are cooling down cooked food, don't do it at room temperature – get it into the fridge as soon as possible.

Hot foods must be kept hot – and that means above 60°C. If you have cooked a meal and plan to serve it later, don't leave it at room temperature. It needs to go into the fridge or be kept above 60°C in an oven or Bain-marié. A probe thermometer is the best way to test the temperature of the food to ensure that it is being maintained at 60°C.



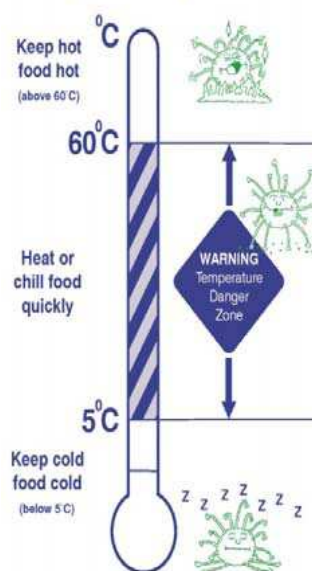
Food must be cooked and reheated thoroughly. Ensure that any food you are cooking is cooked through, such as roast chicken or pork, by slicing it open to check, and using a probe thermometer. If you are reheating previously cooked foods you must reheat it quickly and it must reach 60°C. For example placing a meat pie in the pie warmer to heat up over 4 hours is NOT acceptable. Microwave it, or put it in the oven first.

So is it safe to eat food that has been left at room temperature? Follow this simple rule for food that have been left at room temperature, but if you are unsure *always* discard your food – it is better to be safe than sorry!

If food is left out above 4°C and below 60°C:

- Less than 2 hours – Refrigerate or consume immediately
- Between 2 and 4 hours – Consume immediately do not store for later use
- Greater than 4 hours – Discard immediately

The temperature danger zone for food



Keeping your food safe

The best way to prevent you, your friends or your customers from getting food poisoning is to keep your food safe. Remember to ALWAYS:

- ✓ Wash your hands
- ✓ Avoid cross-contamination
- ✓ Store Cold food below 4°C
- ✓ Store Hot food above 60°C

