

# FACTSHEET



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## Food safety

When people get sick from eating food, this is known as 'food borne' illness or 'food poisoning'.

Some types of bacteria and viruses can cause food poisoning. Although food poisoning is usually mild and lasts a short time, it can become a serious problem for some children, especially if they have a condition that decreases their immunity.

### Handling food

Always wash your hands properly before preparing food, after handling raw foods, going to the toilet, handling garbage, smoking or touching pets. Teach your child to also wash their hands before meals, after going to the toilet and after touching pets.

### Tips for hand washing

- Use soap and running warm water.
- Wash hands vigorously and count to fifteen.
- Rinse hands well and count to fifteen.
- Dry hands well with paper towel, a hand drier or clean cloth.

### Tips to prevent the growth of bacteria

Incorrect storage or handling of food can allow bacteria to multiply.

- Check "use by" and "best before" dates when buying food, and before eating.
- Make sure packages are not damaged, rusted, pierced or bulging.
- Clean out your refrigerator and food cupboard regularly.

- Perishable foods (e.g. dairy, meats, seafood etc.) should be stored in a cold fridge (less than 4-5°C) and eaten when fresh.
- Keep freezer temperature below -18°C. You can check the temperature of your freezer and fridge with a thermometer.
- After shopping, store foods as quickly as possible in the fridge and keep in the fridge until eaten. Taking a cooler bag with an ice-brick can help keep products cool in the car.
- Always cook food well, and keep steaming hot until ready to serve.
- Cool leftovers quickly by covering and placing directly into the refrigerator or freezer (even when still hot). Use or freeze leftovers within 1-2 days of cooking.
- Leftover foods should be thoroughly reheated until all parts of the food are steaming hot.
- Do not reheat food more than once.
- Mark foods to be frozen with the date packaged or to be eaten by. Frozen foods can be kept safely for many months, but texture and flavour changes can occur if kept too long.
- Thaw frozen food in the microwave or by placing it in the refrigerator. Do not thaw at room temperature i.e. on the kitchen bench.
- Food cannot be re-frozen once it has been defrosted and heated/ cooked.

### Preventing food contamination

Raw meat, fish, poultry and raw vegetables can contain large numbers of bacteria. These foods can cross-contaminate ready-to-eat food if they are not stored or handled carefully.

- Make sure that cooked foods do not touch raw foods.
- Wash your hands after handling raw foods.
- Cover all foods before storing in the refrigerator; freezer and cupboards to make sure that food does not spill from one dish into another, and that pests do not have access.
- Wash raw fruit and vegetables under clean running water, and eat as soon as possible after preparation.
- Make sure that the same tea towel used for drying dishes is not used for wiping hands or bench tops.
- Dishcloths and tea towels should be regularly washed or replaced.
- Use separate chopping boards and utensils for cooked or ready to eat foods (such as salads or vegetables) and raw foods (such as meat).
- Wash utensils such as knives, chopping boards, tongs etc. thoroughly in between handling raw and cooked food.
- Avoid preparing foods if you have symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhoea.
- Keep food preparation areas free from pets, books and bags.

## Keeping lunchboxes safe

Food can often sit in lunchboxes for up to 5 hours. It is important to keep food safe during this time by keeping higher risk foods out of the 'temperature danger zone' of 5°C to 60°C. Ideas to keep lunchboxes safe include:

- use insulated lunch boxes or cooler bags
- keep a frozen drink or freezer brick inside the lunch box
- if preparing lunches the night before, keep in the fridge until packing it
- encourage children to keep the lunch box in their schoolbag and to store it out of direct sunlight.

Any perishable food such as meat, poultry or egg sandwiches, should be thrown out if not eaten that day.

Alternatively, pack lunch options that do not need to be kept cool to stay safe, such as:

- sandwiches with fillings such as hard cheeses, pickles and some spreads (e.g. Vegemite)
- canned meat or fish
- whole (uncut) fruit and vegetables.

## Higher risk foods

Some foods need extra care during storage, preparation and handling. These foods can include:

- Pre-packed salads (e.g. coleslaw, green salad, potato salad, Greek salad).
- Pre-cut fruit salads.
- Pre-cooked chicken (e.g. diced chicken used in sandwich shops, cooked chicken from shops).

- Rare or undercooked hamburgers or sausages.
- Cold delicatessen meats (e.g. pate, ham, salami, and other fermented meats including those made at home).
- Raw seafood (ready to eat).

## For more information

Please contact a dietitian or visit the following websites if you have any questions.

Sources:

### NSW Food Authority:

[www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumers/keeping-food-safe/at-home/](http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumers/keeping-food-safe/at-home/)

### Multicultural Health Communication Service Factsheets, NSW:

<http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/mhcs/publication-pdfs/3335/bhc-3335-eng.pdf/view>

### Food Safety Information Council:

[www.foodsafety.asn.au](http://www.foodsafety.asn.au)

## Remember

- Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water.
- Keep hot foods steaming hot.
- Keep cold foods refrigerated.
- Cook food thoroughly.
- Separate raw and ready to eat foods during storage and cooking.
- Keep kitchen and cooking utensils clean.