

Preparing Safe Food to eat



The Environmental Health Department is commonly asked for advice on preparing safe food to eat. By practising good food hygiene, you can prevent people from becoming ill, and prevent food from spoiling or becoming tainted. Food poisoning can make family and friends very ill, while spoiled or tainted food is money wasted.

Good food hygiene is more than just cleanliness. It also includes:

- Protecting food from contamination by bacteria, poisons and other matter,
- Preventing bacteria from multiplying to numbers which could result in food poisoning or spoilage.
- Destroying any harmful bacteria by thorough cooking or processing.

How can you produce safe food to eat?

Personal hygiene

- Avoid handling food if you have any signs of a stomach upset or diarrhoea.
- Wash your hands thoroughly before you start handling food, after visiting the toilet, blowing your nose, handling refuse, handling pets, smoking etc. Use plenty of soap and hot water. We recommend you use paper towels for drying your hands.
- Cover any wounds or sores with water proof dressings.
- Wear an apron and tie long hair back.
- Never smoke during food preparation. If you have stopped for a cigarette, thoroughly wash your hands afterwards.

Shopping for groceries

- Always check for use-by or best-before dates. Buy items with plenty of time left before the date expires. Never buy or use products which are past their expiry dates.
- Do not buy food in cans which are dented, blown or rusty.
- After shopping, travel straight home and place the perishable products immediately in a refrigerator or freezer. Perishable

foods are those which have come from an animal source such as meats, eggs, and dairy products.

Food storage and preparation

- Perishable food must not remain unrefrigerated for more than 2 hours, after which it may become unsafe to eat. We call this the 2 hour rule. The 2 hours includes travel time from the grocery shop, preparation time before cooking and serving time.
- Thoroughly wash all fruit, vegetables and herbs, as these can carry food poisoning bacteria.
- Use separate cloths for different tasks and wash or replace cloths and sponges frequently. Bacteria love the wet and nutrient rich environment provided by a dirty cloth or sponge.
- Prevent cross contamination (which is the passing of bacteria from one food to another, for example raw meat to prepared or ready to eat foods) by:
 - Separating raw food from cooked or ready to eat foods. Put raw meat on the bottom shelf in the fridge so it doesn't drip on other products.
 - Using separate equipment such as chopping boards, knives and cloths for different tasks. Designate a particular chopping board for raw meat. If this is not possible, wash all equipment in hot, soapy water immediately after using it for raw meat.
- Most food taken from the freezer can be cooked immediately, but meat must be completely thawed before cooking. Thawing should be carried out in the refrigerator, under cold, running water or, if food is to be used immediately, in a microwave.
- Cook all meat thoroughly. In general meat is cooked when it is piping hot in the centre and the juices run clear.
- After cooking, if the food is not to be eaten immediately, cool it rapidly and place it in a refrigerator. One method of cooling products rapidly is to spread the food out into shallow containers. Remember the 2 hour rule when cooling food.

- Cover food to prevent it drying out, to avoid cross contamination and to stop it absorbing odours from other products.
- When reheating leftovers, ensure they are thoroughly reheated and consumed immediately. Never serve or eat partially reheated products.
- Never leave food in an opened can. Any unused contents should be emptied into a suitable container such as a plastic bowl, and covered.
- Check your fridge is operating at 4°C or lower and your freezer at -18°C or colder. If it is warmer, turn it down. If you don't have a thermometer, we strongly recommend you buy one - they're not expensive and worth every cent.

Rubbish and animals

- Keep all kitchen waste securely covered so animals and pests cannot get into it.
- Wash your hands after handling any refuse or refuse containers.
- Keep pets out of the kitchen and away from food preparation areas. Carry out regular inspections for mice, rats and insect pests. Set up pest control measures if signs of activity are found.

Cleaning

- Clean up any spillages immediately.
- Thoroughly wash all equipment, utensils, and surfaces after preparing food. Remember to use hot water with plenty of dishwashing liquid.
- You may wish to occasionally soak wooden chopping boards, cloths, aprons etc in a mild dilution of bleach to ensure effective disinfection. Check the directions on your bottle of bleach for dilution measurements. Rinse well before using again for food preparation.