



Food safety advice

COOKING FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS



Their health in your hands

You don't want to be blamed for an outbreak of food poisoning, so do take food hygiene seriously. Catering for your own family is difficult enough, but catering for a large number of people requires a lot more care and thought.

Who's the Boss?

Hopefully, someone with some experience or training in food handling/hygiene! Someone needs to take responsibility for making sure that the correct standards of food hygiene are being met and that the food being prepared is safe to eat.

Not feeling well?

If you are not feeling well then stay away from the kitchen and any place you would be in contact with food. A heavy cold or sore throat, boils or a septic wound, diarrhoea, vomiting or an 'upset stomach'. Whatever the complaint, do not take the risk of passing on your infection to others. Ask a friend who has none of the symptoms to replace you.

Clean over clothing

You need to wear a clean apron before you start handling food. Hang your outdoor clothes outside the kitchen.

Let's be personal

Cleanliness in the handling of food starts with personal hygiene and keeping your hands clean is especially important. Before starting food preparation, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water and dry them thoroughly. Wash them often during food handling, but particularly after handling raw meat/poultry and vegetables, after going to the toilet and after handling refuse or waste food.

If you're working in someone else's kitchen (like a church hall) take some soap and a clean hand towel (or paper disposable towels) with you as well as some antibacterial spray for cleaning.

Make sure that you have first aid material with you. If you should cut or burn yourself, cover up the wound straight away with a waterproof plaster. If the plaster gets dirty or wet, replace it.





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Is the kitchen clean?

Look at the place where you will be preparing food – is it in good condition and clean, and can you keep it that way? If you are going to be catering in someone else's kitchen – visit it before hand and make sure that you have all the necessary facilities, for example, hygienic work surfaces, sinks, cutting boards and hot water!

Remember you shouldn't wash your hands in a washing up sink... ideally there should be a separate wash hand basin for hand washing and that should also have a supply of hot water to it, along with soap and towels.

Before you start work, give the kitchen a thorough clean and make sure that you treat all work surfaces, cutting boards, equipment and utensils with a bactericide (something that kills bacteria!) e.g. Dettol, Milton or other antibacterial product.

Food needs properly looking after

It is essential to keep raw and cooked foods well away from each other. It is particularly important to keep all raw meats, raw fish, raw poultry and raw eggs away from all ready to eat foods such as salads, cooked meats, sandwiches, desserts etc.

Wash all work surfaces, equipment and utensils thoroughly with hot soapy water and a bactericide in between using them for raw cooked foods and ready to eat foods. Separate chopping boards should be used for raw meat and ready to eat foods. Cooked food should always be stored away from raw food in the fridge (ready to eat at the top with raw meats below).

Keep out

Don't let young children or animals into the area where you are preparing food. It's risky from the hygiene point of view and safer for them too if they keep away. Always make sure that any dirty laundry is kept out of the room when you are preparing foods.

Rubbish

Keep your waste bins clean and do not over fill them. Make sure you dispose of any rubbish in a suitable manner when the bin becomes full. Foot operated bins, or swing top bins are often a good idea, as you do not have to handle a dirty bin lid to dispose of any rubbish. Alternatively bins without lids are also suitable.



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Cooking ahead of time may not be such a good idea...

If you want to cook/prepare food in advance you may find that you don't have enough refrigerated storage space to keep the food in before the day of the event. It's always best to make the time between the preparation of the food and eating of the food as short as possible.

You must always keep the cooked/prepared foods in the refrigerator until they are ready to be either served or reheated. Preparation on the day is safest and always best.



Temperature Control

Temperature control plays a vital role in keeping food safe. Make sure you have plenty of fridge space available, and that your fridge is running at a temperature between 0°C and 8°C (ideally 0°C to 5°C). You may need to buy a fridge thermometer to check the temperature of the fridge.

If you do not have enough fridge space, you could use cool boxes and ice packs to keep the food cold for a short amount of time.

Meat and Poultry

If the meat or poultry is frozen, thaw it thoroughly before cooking, in an area well away from cooked foods. (This is best done in by placing the food in a container and putting it at the bottom of the fridge). Make sure it has fully defrosted before you cook it.

When cooked, make sure that the inside temperature reaches at least 75°C. There should be no blood/pink meat (beef and lamb can be served rare) and the juices should run clear.



If you are roasting meat joints, they should not be more than 6lbs in weight, and in the case of a poultry carcass, the weight should not exceed 10lbs. It is safer to cook several smaller joints/birds rather than one. When roasting poultry, the main cavity should not be stuffed as this affects the cooking process.

If the meat is not going to be eaten straight away then it should be cooled quickly and placed in a fridge within one and a half hours of cooking.



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Buffets

You should prepare the buffet as close to the time of the function as possible and lay the actual buffet out as close to the time of eating as possible. If the food stands around at room temperature, food poisoning bacteria can grow rapidly.



If you are making cold meat sandwiches and rolls, keep them refrigerated until the buffet is laid out. Food should not be allowed to be laid out on a buffet for more than four hours. After this time, the food should be thrown away. Meat pies, sausages, chicken portions etc. should be delivered to you as late as possible and should be kept cool or preferably, refrigerated. Mayonnaise, coleslaw, rice salads etc. are high risk items and should be kept cool and covered and preferably, refrigerated.

Eggs

If you are making any foods that involve the use of raw eggs (e.g. mayonnaise, chocolate mousse etc.) you should use a pasteurised egg product, rather than fresh eggs, which could contain salmonella - a type of food poisoning bacteria. Pasteurised eggs are now freely available in most supermarkets or catering suppliers. Keep all your egg based dishes chilled prior to consumption.

Curries and other hot meals

Curries, stews, rice, gravies, sauces and custard should all be prepared on the day of the event and cooled quickly after cooking unless they are to be eaten immediately, in which case they should be kept hot (above 63°C). If you have prepared these kinds of foods then it is better to have a number of small pans for reheating rather than one large pan. In a large pan the centre of the food takes a long time to get to the right temperature, during this time bacteria have an ideal opportunity to grow and develop. Make sure that the pans are stirred frequently to ensure they are reheated properly.

Rice

Cooked rice is a particular hazard as a serious food poisoning bacteria grows well in it (*Bacillus Cereus*). You must cook rice just before serving hot or cool it quickly and keep it in the refrigerator until it is reheated.

Good Luck

Good luck with your event! Food hygiene training courses are available for people who want to know more. For details on available training courses please see our fact sheet on Food Hygiene Training. Further advice on food safety is also available on our website.