



# Food Safety at Home

## Tips for keeping food safe for you and your family

About one in five cases of foodborne illnesses are linked to poor food practices in the home. By taking a few simple steps you can keep the food you buy and take home safe to eat.

### Clean, Separate, Chill, Cook and Check the Label

#### Clean

Many foodborne illness outbreaks are caused by poor hygiene practices. This includes poor personal hygiene, using dirty utensils and preparing food in unclean spaces.

Proper hand washing is one of the most important ways to prevent foodborne illness.

To properly wash your hands:

- use soapy water
- wash your whole hand including between your fingers and under your nails
- rinse well
- dry with a clean towel.

Wash and dry your hands thoroughly **before** handling food and **after**:

- using the toilet or changing a nappy
- smoking
- touching animals
- blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
- cleaning surfaces or handling rubbish
- handling raw foods, such as raw meat, poultry, eggs and fresh fruit and vegetables.

If you have been unwell with diarrhoea or vomiting, do not prepare food for others for at least two days.

Maintaining a clean kitchen is important for reducing the risk of foodborne illness for yourself and those for who you prepare food.

- Ensure all plates, utensils, lunchboxes and chopping boards are washed in hot soapy water or at high temperatures in your dishwasher before use.
- Use separate plates, utensils and chopping boards for raw meats and cooked foods.
- Replace chopping boards when they become badly scratched and dish clothes when they show signs of permanent soiling.
- Wipe down benches and tables every time food is prepared or served on them.
- Wash tea towels regularly.

## Separate

Cross-contamination is a common cause of foodborne illness. It involves the spread of microorganisms from one food or piece of equipment to another. For example, from raw chicken to cooked food, or from a dirty chopping board to salad vegetables.

Certain foods need to be kept separate from each other to prevent cross-contamination. In particular, raw meat should be kept separate to cooked food.

When preparing food, use separate chopping boards, plates and utensils for raw and cooked foods.

When storing food, keep raw food on the lower shelves of the fridge in leak-proof containers or bags to prevent spills onto other food.

## Chill

Microorganisms can grow and multiply quickly between 5 and 60°C. This is known as the temperature danger zone. It is important to limit the time perishable foods spend in the temperature danger zone to prevent the growth of harmful microorganisms.

Keeping perishable foods cool (i.e. at 5°C or less) is one of the most important ways to keep food safe.

### Ensure your fridge is kept at 5°C or less.

- Use a thermometer to check that the temperature of your fridge is 5°C or below.
- Defrost and marinate foods in the fridge, not on the bench.
- Don't leave leftovers out to cool overnight – they should be covered and placed in the fridge as soon as they have stopped steaming.
- Don't overfill your fridge – air needs to circulate to keep food cool.

- After buying chilled or frozen food, get them home as quickly as possible. For longer trips or on hot days, consider taking an insulated cooler or a bag with an ice pack to keep food cold.

When deciding whether to use perishable food left in the temperature danger zone, use the following guide:

Time left at 5-60°C	Action
Less than 2 hours	Refrigerate or use immediately
Between 2 and 4 hours	Use immediately
More than 4 hours	Discard
<b>Remember – if in doubt, throw it out!</b>	

## Cook

Food should be cooked to above 60°C to kill disease-causing microorganisms. Undercooking meat and poultry, in particular, can be very dangerous.

- Most food should be cooked to an internal temperature of at least 75°C.
- Use a meat thermometer to check the internal temperature of meats while cooking.
- Cook poultry until the meat is white and any juices run clear.
- Cook hamburgers, mince, sausages, and rolled or stuffed roasts until there is no pink left and any juices run clear.
- Cook white fish until it flakes easily with a fork.
- Place cooked food onto clean, unused plates.
- Where possible, cook food when needed and not too far in advance.
- Reheat foods thoroughly so they are steaming or boiling.

Whole meats, such as steak cuts, may be safely consumed rare (i.e. thoroughly cooked on the outside but pink in the middle). This is because disease-causing microorganisms present on the surface of the meat cannot penetrate the inner tissues and will be killed by cooking. This is not the case for minced meat products, kebabs or other meats where microorganisms are carried to the inside of the product prior to cooking. Those products need to be cooked all the way through.

### Check the label

Food labels provide information that can help you eat safe food.

Always check the 'best before' or 'use by' date given on the food label. Foods that should not be consumed after a certain date for health and safety reasons will have a use by date. **Do not eat food after its use by date.** For foods marked with a best before date, it is still safe to eat the food after that date but it may have lost quality and some nutritional value. Food with a shelf-life of more than two years and bread

products with a shelf-life of less than seven days do not need to have a best before or use by date.

Always follow the cooking and storage instructions given on food labels. Some foods initially stored in the cupboard need to be kept in the fridge or used within a certain time after opening.

Check food labels for allergen and nutritional information. For further advice about food allergies see the information provided by Food Standards Australia New Zealand ([www.foodstandards.gov.au](http://www.foodstandards.gov.au)) and Allergy & Anaphylaxis Australia ([www.allergyfacts.org.au](http://www.allergyfacts.org.au)).

Not all foods have to bear a label. For example, foods made and packaged on the premise where it is sold (e.g. at a bakery), foods packaged in the presence of the customer (e.g. at a deli) and packaged fruit and vegetables where you can see the product through the packaging may be unlabelled. You should ask for information about unpackaged foods at the point of sale.

For further information and advice call the Public Health Hotline on Freecall 1800 671 738 or email [pop.health@dhhs.tas.gov.au](mailto:pop.health@dhhs.tas.gov.au)