

# 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 of short duration, it can become a serious problem in some people, particularly those with conditions that decrease their immunity.

### Clean hands

Clean hands reduce the risk of food poisoning. Always wash your hands properly before preparing food, after handling raw foods, going to the toilet, smoking or handling pets.

### Tips for hand washing

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

### Clean

- Wash utensils, benches and cutting boards with soap and warm water, and dry thoroughly.
- Wash your hands frequently especially after handling raw meats, or vegetables with visible soil.
- Dishcloths and tea towels should be regularly washed or replaced.

- Clean out your refrigerator and food cupboard regularly.
- Make sure packages are not damaged, rusted, pierced or bulging.
- Wash raw fruit and vegetables under clean running water, and eat as soon as possible after preparation.
- Cover all foods before storing in the fridge, freezer and cupboards to make sure that food does not spill from one dish into another, and that pests do not have access to contents.

### Separate

- Don't let raw meat juices drip onto other foods.
- Ensure that cooked foods do not touch raw foods. Use different cutting boards and utensils for each.
- Don't put cooked meat back onto the plate/cutting board that raw meat was on.
- Avoid making food for others if sick with something like vomiting or diarrhoea.

### Chill

- Perishable foods (e.g. dairy, meats, seafood etc) should be stored in a cold refrigerator (less than 4-5°C) and eaten when fresh.
- After shopping, store foods as quickly as possible in the refrigerator and keep refrigerated until eaten.
- Cool leftovers quickly by covering and placing directly into the fridge or freezer (even when still hot). Use or freeze leftovers within 1-2 days of cooking.

- Mark foods to be frozen with the date packaged or to be eaten by. Frozen foods can be kept safely for several months.
- Thaw frozen food in the microwave or by placing it in the fridge. 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.

## Cooking & heating

- Properly cooking food minimises the risk of food poisoning.
- Always cook food well, and keep steaming hot until serving.
- Ensure that meats are cooked all the way through, until juices run clear. This is especially important for chicken, pork, turkey and duck. Make sure there is no pink left in mince or sausages.
- Heat to boiling all marinades containing raw meat juices before serving.
- Leftover foods should be reheated until all parts of the food are steaming hot. Do not reheat food more than once.

## 'Use-by' and 'Best before' dates

### 'Use-by'

- Foods must be eaten or thrown away by the 'use-by' date
- Foods may be unsafe to eat after their 'use-by' date, even if they look fine, because the nutrients in the food may become unstable or a build-up of bacteria may occur.
- It is illegal to sell foods after a 'use-by' date.
- Common 'use-by' foods include milk, meats, sliced deli meats.

### 'Best before':

- Foods are still safe to eat after the 'best before' date, as long as they are not damaged or spoiled.
- The 'best before' date simply suggests that the product may lose some of its quality after this date.
- Foods can be legally sold after a 'best before' date as long as they are not damaged or spoiled.
- You can expect these foods to retain their colour, taste, texture and flavour as long as they are stored correctly.
- Common 'best before' foods include canned foods, cereals, biscuits, sauces, chocolate, sugar, flour and frozen foods.

## Lunchbox safety

The bugs that cause food poisoning grow quickly between 5°C and 60°C, so it's important to keep lunch boxes cool.

- Use an insulated lunch box or cooler bag.
- Pack a frozen drink bottle or freezer brick inside the lunch box or bag, next to foods that should be kept cold, for example yoghurt, cheese, meat or salad.
- If making lunches ahead of time, keep them in the fridge until leaving for school or they can be frozen in advance. Foods that freeze well include bread, cooked meat, cheese or Vegemite™.
- Ask children to keep packed lunches in their school bag, to keep their bag out of direct sunlight and away from heaters, ideally in a cool, dark place such as a locker.
- Warn children against sharing drink bottles.
- Throw out any leftovers when they get home.

### 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.

## For more information

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

### Sources:

NSW Food Authority:

<http://www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/consumers/keeping-food-safe>

Multicultural Health Communication Service Factsheets, NSW:

[http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/mhcs/publication-pdfs/3335/bhc-3335-eng.pdf/at\\_download/file](http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/mhcs/publication-pdfs/3335/bhc-3335-eng.pdf/at_download/file)

Food Safety Information Council:

<http://www.foodsafety.asn.au/resources/>