

New Zealand Food Safety

Haumaru Kai Aotearoa

Food safety at home



This booklet provides advice and guidance on what you can do to avoid food poisoning.

Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua



Stay well – keep food safe

Delicious, nutritious food is one of the great things in life. There's nothing better than a fantastic meal with family and friends. But there's also nothing worse than the food causing days of misery thanks to it being contaminated by pathogens (bacteria, viruses and other organisms that can cause illness).

Foodborne illness is estimated to strike about 200,000 New Zealanders every year. Nearly half of these are attributed to food handling, preparation, cooking or storage in the home.

Given those numbers, your chances of eating food that will make you sick seem high. Luckily, you can reduce the risk of you, your family or friends having a nasty foodborne illness by following the food-safe tips and rules in this booklet.

Remembering the 3Cs (Clean, Cook, Chill) and handwashing rules can help keep those pathogens at bay.

Keep this booklet handy and make sure everyone who handles or prepares food knows the basics of food safety.



Clean

Good food hygiene starts with clean hands, but doesn't stop there. Washing hands thoroughly is key in helping prevent foodborne illnesses (see page 8). But it's equally important to make sure your cooking area and tools are clean, too.

Clean

- Wash your hands with soap and dry well before handling, cooking and eating food.
- Wash chopping boards, knives and kitchen tools in hot soapy water and dry well after using with raw meat.
- Don't wash chicken or raw meat. Washing can spread bacteria in your sink and kitchen.
- Keep your fridge clean by wiping or washing surfaces regularly.



TOP TIP

Always clean dishcloths and tea towels regularly

It's way too late when they start to smell. A good idea is to put a fresh dishcloth out every day and to change tea towels when they get wet. To get your dishcloths nice and clean, soak them in shallow water overnight with 5–10 drops of ordinary household bleach or put them through the hot wash cycle of the automatic dishwasher. A good wash and a day on the line exposed to wind and the sun's ultraviolet rays will also do the job.

Cleaning sponges

A dishcloth or sponge can be effectively cleaned by placing it wet in a microwave on high for three to four minutes. The heat will kill off bacteria and viruses. Be careful when removing from the microwave as it will be steaming hot. Sponges with a metal or steel mesh should not be placed in a microwave.

Separate sponges and cloths

Use separate sponges or cloths for the dishes, the bench and the floor. If you have different coloured cloths for different tasks it will be easier to distinguish what they are for. Some people use green for dishes (it rhymes with clean), blue for the bench (they both start with “b”) and yellow for the floor (when you wipe up spills, the light colour shows any dirt which reminds you to mop the floor). Use paper towels for spills, especially wiping up meat juices and then wipe with a cloth and hot water and detergent.

Separate chopping boards

Use separate chopping boards for raw and cooked meat, fish, vegetables and bread. Colour-coded boards make it easier to remember which ones to use for each type of food. White is the best colour for visually spotting food debris. It is possible to get white plastic chopping boards that are colour-coded on the edge.



Cook

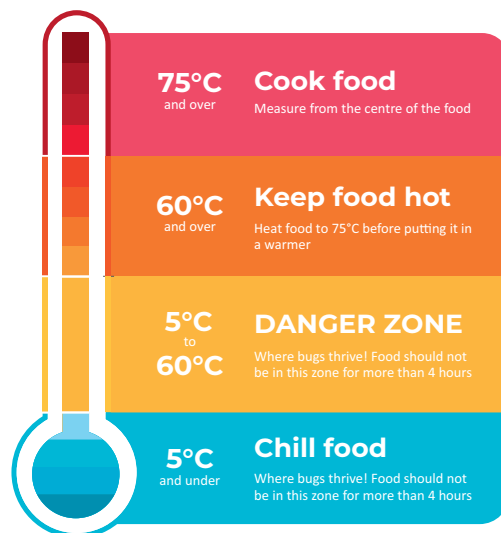
Ever sunk your teeth into a juicy chicken drumstick only to find the meat bloody at the bone? Apart from being unappetising, undercooked meat may be dangerous as it can carry a range of harmful bacteria including *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella* and *E. coli*.

Cook

- Cook raw chicken, sausages and mince patties throughout so that the juices run clear and there is no pink in the centre.
- Defrost frozen foods thoroughly or they won't cook properly in the middle. Defrost food in your fridge or use the defrost setting on your microwave.
- Reheat until piping hot. Warm doesn't kill bacteria. Hot does.
- Don't reheat leftovers more than once.

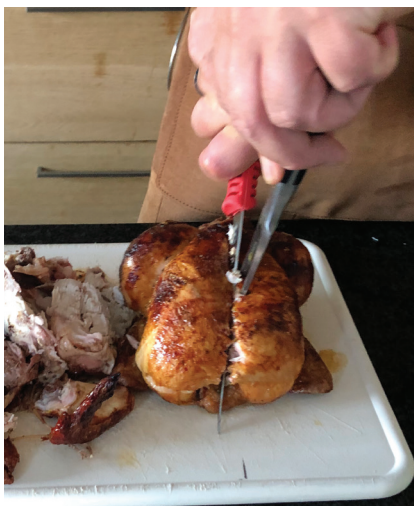
Keep hot food hot and cold food cold

Keeping food at the right temperature stops bugs growing and it will stay safer longer



Check the date

- Always check the “Use by” dates on any packaged food. Don’t buy or eat food once the “Use by” date has expired. Don’t confuse this with the “Best before” date – food can still be sold and eaten past the “Best before” date if it has been stored according to the instructions on the label. (More information about labelling is given in our booklet Understanding food labels, see page 20 for how to order.)



TOP TIP

Defrost food

Always defrost frozen foods thoroughly before cooking, unless the manufacturer’s instructions tell you to cook from frozen. Defrosting ensures the food will cook properly and within the normal cooking time. Foods shouldn’t be left on the kitchen bench to defrost as this increases the chances of bacteria growing because the defrosted surface quickly warms to room temperature, even though the middle might still be frozen. The safest way to defrost foods is to put them in the fridge overnight or – if you are running out of time – use the defrost or lowest power setting on your microwave.

Cook meat thoroughly

It is important poultry, minced meat and sausages are cooked right through and the best way to make sure meat is cooked is to use a meat thermometer. Colour is not always a good indicator – uncooked products can appear brown and some cooked meats can appear pink or red. If you don’t have a thermometer, cook poultry and pork until the juices run clear and sausages and meat patties until they are no longer pink in the middle.

Leftovers

Any uneaten food should be put in the fridge within two hours of cooking, and when reheating leftovers make sure they are piping hot through to the centre.

Chill

Prepared food should never be allowed to sit at room temperature for longer than two hours. The warmer the temperature, the shorter the time food will stay safe. Bacteria love the warmth, and can double in numbers in minutes.

Remember – if in doubt, chuck it out.

Cover

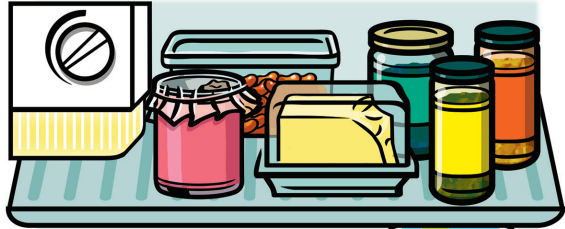
- Always cover stored food – even in the fridge or cupboard. Put your food into containers with tight-sealing lids. You can also use cling film or foil. Just keep in mind to never re-use foil or film to wrap other food
- Keep raw meat and poultry covered in the bottom of the fridge and away from ready-to-eat food, fruit and vegetables to avoid dripping juices.
- When cooking outdoors, ensure that all food remains covered and cool until ready to cook or eat.

Keeping your fridge at the recommended temperature of 2–5°C is important as it helps prevent harmful bacteria from multiplying. Most pathogenic bacteria (those that cause foodborne illness) cannot grow at low refrigeration temperatures. A suitably chilly fridge allows perishable foods to be stored and eaten safely over two or three days.

Following a few simple guidelines will help ensure food stays safe in your fridge.



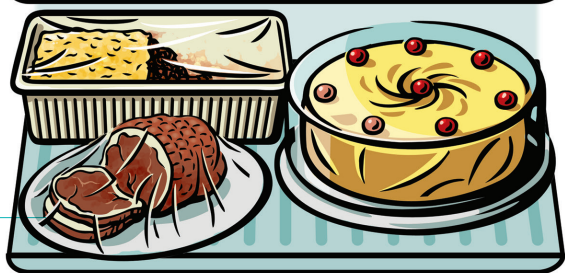
CLEAN
COOK
***CHILL**
DON'T GET ILL



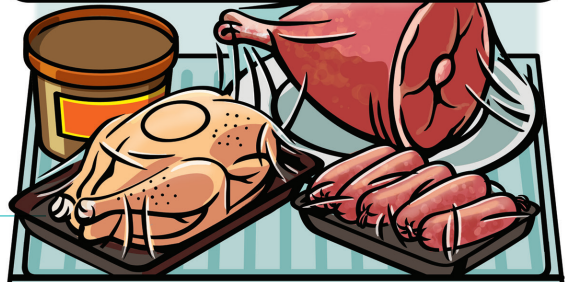
Ready-to-eat food at top



Cover all cooked food if not in sealed containers



Covered raw meat at bottom



Fruit and vegetables should be covered when possible



TOP TIP

Make sure your fridge is operating properly

Sometimes your fridge will let you know it is struggling to keep cool. If the motor is running a lot of the time or if perishables such as milk and meat go off quicker than they should, the fridge temperature setting might need tweaking, or the door seals replacing.

Check your fridge temperature

Fridge thermometers are available from some hardware and kitchen or homeware stores. Alternatively, you can place an ordinary thermometer in a glass of water in your fridge overnight and take a reading when you first open the door the next morning.

Temperatures may vary throughout the fridge. The door is usually the warmest place and the top shelf is often warmer than the others, although this may vary depending on your model. To get an overall idea of the operating temperature, a reading should be taken in the middle of the fridge. Read the fridge manual for more information and tips on how best to use your particular model.

Cool before refrigerating

Cooling hot foods slightly before refrigerating them will help avoid raising the temperature of other stored foods. If you have a large amount of food, such as rice or a casserole, spread it out in a flat tray and it will cool quicker. When it has stopped steaming, you can put it into a sealed or covered container and into the fridge.

Don't overfill your fridge

Avoid stuffing your fridge full as overloading prevents the cold air from circulating properly and can stop it from keeping all your food nice and cold. Always let foods marinate in the coolness of your fridge, not on your kitchen bench.

Keep your fridge clean

Wipe up spills immediately, wash surfaces with hot, soapy water and dry thoroughly with a clean towel or paper towels. It's a good idea to have a general stocktake and clean your fridge every week or two. Even though bacteria and fungi don't like the cold, some will still grow, though slowly.

Chill

- Refrigerate or freeze any leftovers within two hours.
- Check the use-by dates on packaged foods. Don't buy or eat once this date has passed.
- If eating outdoors, use a chilly bin with ice-packs to keep food cold.
- Eat leftovers within two days.
- When in doubt, chuck it out.

Hand washing

It's one of the oldest and best ways to prevent a foodborne illness, but one that we tend to take for granted – and also forget. Giving your hands a good scrub is an important measure to prevent spreading pathogens to food.

Always wash your hands before handling food. It's equally vital to wash them after touching raw meat and poultry, going to the toilet, blowing your nose or sneezing into your hand while preparing food, changing nappies, handling pets and after gardening.

To make sure your hands are really clean, you should wash them thoroughly using soap and warm water and then dry them on a clean, dry towel or paper towel. Making sure hands are dry is critical. If you want to be particularly careful, especially after handling raw meat for example, use a paper towel to turn off the tap. This is because you could have transferred bacteria to the tap when you turned it on with your unwashed hands.

How often did your parents ask you to wash your hands before eating?

WASH YOUR HANDS
Before eating/making food

Wash
20 secs
Use soap and warm water
Rinse well

Dry
20 secs
Front and back with clean towels

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The infographic is set against an orange background. It features two circular illustrations. The left circle shows hands being washed under a faucet with soap suds and a soap dispenser. The right circle shows hands being dried with a blue towel. Both circles have a blue circular badge with '20 secs' written inside. The New Zealand Food Safety logo is in the top right corner, and the website URL is at the bottom right.

Safer food for people at risk

People who have low immunity may be more at risk for foodborne illnesses.

Or you might have a food allergy, and consuming certain foods could have severe or even life-threatening consequences.

While there is no such thing as foods that are guaranteed to be safe for everyone, there is plenty of information to guide those more at risk to identify high-risk foods and select safer options.

Many things can make a person more vulnerable to foodborne illnesses. For example, having advanced cancer or undergoing chemotherapy, can suppress the immune system. Low stomach acid levels, whether caused by a stomach operation or medication, also place someone at higher risk of getting a foodborne illness as stomach acid normally provides a defence by killing many pathogens. Pregnant women, premature babies and sick children are part of the at-risk group, too. If in doubt, your doctor will be able to help assess whether you have low immunity.

While everyone should take care to handle food safely, some people need to take more care. People with low immunity are at higher risk of getting infections.



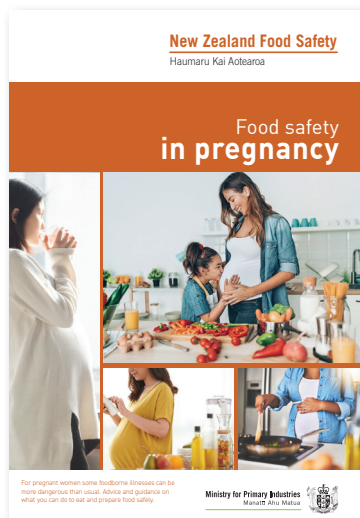
At-risk people are advised not to eat some foods, such as foods containing raw eggs or uncooked fish, but plenty of other foods can be safely enjoyed as long as extra caution is exercised when preparing and consuming them. Yoghurt for example should be eaten within two days of opening, so buying single-serve pots may be better than large containers. Eating stuffing from a chicken or turkey is not advisable if it is cooked in the bird, but can be eaten when cooked in a separate dish and eaten hot.

If you have food allergies and are invited out to dinner, let your hosts know what you need to avoid. If you're cooking for someone with an allergy, take special care as even minimal traces can cause severe reactions in some people.

More in depth information for at-risk people is available in MPI's three booklets *Food safety when you have low immunity*, *Food safety in pregnancy*, and *Eating safely when you have food allergies*.

New Zealand Food Safety resources are available at no charge. Phone **0800 00 83 33** or email **brand@mpi.govt.nz** to request printed copies.

Or they can be downloaded from our website at **www.mpi.govt.nz/food-safety-home/**.



Tips for poultry and meat

After grocery shopping, you might have a long trip home or make a few stops on the way so put meat or poultry products in a chilly bag or bin with an icepack to help keep them at a safe temperature.

A study carried out by Environmental Science & Research showed the difference it made putting meat into a chilly bag with an icepack when leaving it in a car on a hot day.

On a balmy January day with the air temperature inside the car hovering around 40°C and the air temperature in the boot roughly 10°C cooler, it took just 90 minutes for the surface temperature on a piece of uninsulated steak on the car's back seat to rise to 35°C. Bacteria grows well in this environment. In the cooler boot, the uninsulated steak rose to 21°C in the same time.

Be cool about the way you transport meat and poultry products from the supermarket to your home.



On the other hand, the temperature of meat kept cold in a chilly bag with an icepack rose only slightly, regardless of whether it was kept in the back seat or the boot.

If meat that had a hot ride home in the car was well-cooked before being eaten, the cooking process would destroy most, if not all, of the bacteria present. But spores and heat stable toxins could still survive and there with a chance of your health being affected. More worrying would be any ready-to-eat meat, such as ham and deli meats, that made the same trip as they would be subject to the same temperature increases but would not undergo further cooking to destroy bacteria.



Don't be chicken about meat safety

- If you have a long trip from the supermarket to your fridge, take a chilly bag or bin and an icepack to keep raw meats and poultry cool.
- Cook meat and chicken thoroughly. Undercooked meat may be dangerous as it can carry a range of bacteria, including *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella* and *E. coli*.
- Cook chicken, minced meat and sausages right through using a meat thermometer or until juices run clear.
- Place raw meat and poultry at the bottom of the fridge where juices cannot leak on to and contaminate other foods.

BBQs and eating outside

Cooking outdoors in warm spring and summer temperatures provides the ideal situation for pathogens to multiply and cause foodborne illness. Outdoor cooks need to take special care when preparing, cooking and storing food for a barbecue.

Before firing up the barbie, make sure all cooking tools and the surfaces food will be put on are cleaned with soap and hot water and then thoroughly dried. **Have one set of utensils for raw items, and another set for cooked foods.** Using just one set almost guarantees that you'll transfer pathogens from raw meat to cooked foods.

Make sure meat, poultry and other perishable foods are stored cold until they are ready for cooking. Once cooked, it is important to put food on a clean plate – not the one the raw meat was stored on.

It is recommended that chicken, meat patties and sausages are precooked before going on the barbecue to ensure they are thoroughly cooked by the time they turn brown and crisp. Cooking on a barbecue is not as accurate or consistent as using a kitchen cooker, so when cooking outdoors you should use a meat thermometer. If you don't have one, keep an eye on the meat to ensure the juices run clear and it is steaming hot right though.

Summer and picnics go hand-in-hand. Following a few simple guidelines will make your outdoor meal a pleasurable experience. **Transporting your food in cooled chilly bags or bins and keeping it cold until it's time to eat will slow the growth of pathogens.** Also keep food covered as much as possible to keep unwanted insects and bugs out.

When asking friends around for a barbecue, you don't want foodborne illness to crash the party.



TOP TIP

10 tips for barbecue food safety

1. Defrost any frozen foods thoroughly before you cook them, or at least check that they are cooked right through before serving.
2. Don't place or prepare raw meat next to cooked or partially cooked meat or other ready-to-eat foods.
3. Use a meat thermometer to check meat is cooked. If you don't have one, cook minced meat burgers and sausages thoroughly (right through to the centre) and cook poultry until the juices run clear.
4. Turn the food regularly so it cooks evenly.
5. If you're expecting lots of guests, consider cooking the food in a conventional oven first then finishing it off on the barbecue.
6. Before you serve it, ensure the centre of the meat is piping hot – don't assume that if it's charred on the outside it will be cooked thoroughly on the inside.
7. Keep raw and cooked meat and poultry separate on the grill.
8. Don't use the same plate to transport raw and cooked foods.
9. It's OK to leave cooked meat for a short time on a corner of the barbecue or covered on a plate for late arrivals; just ensure it's protected from flies.
10. Handle food with tongs or other equipment, and use separate equipment to handle raw and cooked meats.

The leftovers

Holiday meals often result in some tasty leftovers, which can make for easy catering the following day, but again because of the higher summer temperatures, take some extra care:

- Refrigerate or freeze any leftovers within two hours of their preparation.
- Cool leftover food in a shallow tray (to help it cool quickly and evenly) then store in a covered container in your fridge.
- Don't reheat leftovers more than once.
- Eat leftovers within two days.
- When in doubt – throw it out.

Keeping kids' lunch boxes safe and cool

New Zealand Food Safety has *my cool lunch box* brochure aimed at school kids (and their parents) that emphasising the importance of keeping lunch boxes “cool”. Over the summer months it’s particularly important to make sure perishable foods are kept cool and lunch boxes kept clean.

- Keep packed lunches in the fridge overnight.
- Don’t eat perishable leftovers when you get home from school.
- Used lunch boxes need a good clean with hot soapy water and must then be thoroughly dried.

Keeping your family's food safe extends to the kids' school lunch boxes, especially during summer when lunch boxes might be sitting in the heat.



Order resources

Schools can order food safety resources for the classroom at no charge.

- Call 0800 00 83 33
- Email brand@mpi.govt.nz or
- Website www.mpi.govt.nz/food-safety-home/

for brochures, posters, stickers and magnets, as well as the *My cool lunch box* brochure.

Notes

www.mpi.govt.nz/food-safety-home/

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This information does not replace or substitute for advice given by an appropriate professional. If you suspect you have a food allergy, you should see an appropriate health professional.

New Zealand Government