



Food Preparation Fact File

The germs that cause food poisoning are at greater risk of multiplying and spreading when we are handling and preparing food. At these times we need to take extra care to control food temperatures and avoid cross-contamination.

Handling food

Wash and dry hands thoroughly before handling food. When you can, use clean kitchen utensils not fingers for handling foods.

Keep raw and cooked food apart at all times. In particular keep raw meat, fish, poultry and other raw foods away from cooked foods and ready-to-eat foods (such as salads, bread and sandwiches).

Wash and dry hands, utensils – including chopping boards and knives - and surfaces thoroughly after preparing raw meat, fish, poultry and other raw foods and before contact with other food. Ideally use separate chopping boards for raw and cooked foods.

Never put cooked food onto a plate which has previously held these raw foods until it has been thoroughly washed.

Do not use the same utensil to stir or serve a cooked meal that was used to prepare the raw ingredients.

Root vegetables such as potatoes, leeks and carrots often have traces of soil on them which can contain harmful bacteria, so wash them thoroughly before use. Don't forget to wash other fruit and veg too, especially if they are going to be eaten raw.

Avoid preparing food for yourself or others if you are ill, especially with vomiting and/or diarrhoea.

Defrosting

When cooking pre-packaged frozen foods always follow instructions on defrosting and/or cooking from frozen.

If cooking from frozen allow sufficient time for food to be thoroughly cooked and check it before serving.

When defrosting foods make sure they are fully defrosted before cooking.

Allow food enough time to thaw. Never re-freeze food once it has started to thaw. Thaw food by placing it on the bottom shelf of the fridge in a container to catch any juices. These juices can be contaminated so wash dishes – and hands – thoroughly after use.

Only thaw food in a microwave oven if it is to be cooked immediately.

To thaw very large turkeys etc more quickly, let them defrost outside the fridge. Put them in a cool place and make sure they are completely thawed before cooking.

Cooking and heating

Follow recipes and label instructions on cooking times and temperatures. Remember to pre-heat the oven properly.

Cook all foods until they are piping hot. Double check that sausages, burgers, pork and poultry are cooked right through; they should not be 'rare' or pink in the middle and when pierced with a knife any juices that run out of the meat should be clear, not bloody.

Lamb and beef (except when minced or rolled) can be eaten rare - but make sure the outer surface is thoroughly cooked to kill any germs on the surface of the meat.

Elderly or sick people, babies, young children and pregnant women should only eat eggs cooked until both yolk and white are solid and should not eat raw or partially cooked fish and shellfish.

Don't cook foods too far in advance. Once cooked, keep foods covered and piping hot (above 63°C) until it's time to eat them. Keep prepared cold foods in the fridge until it's time to eat.

When using a microwave, stir foods and drinks and allow them to stand for a couple of minutes to avoid hot or cold spots. Check food is piping hot throughout before serving.

Reheat foods until they are piping hot right through. Don't reheat foods more than once.

Cooling

Do not put hot food directly into the fridge or freezer, let it cool sufficiently first; but remember that cooling should be completed within one or two hours after cooking. To speed cooling divide foods into smaller portions, place in a wide dish and stand this in a shallow tray of cold water.

Extra care for babies

Babies' immune systems are less developed than adults'. That puts them at greater risk of illness so take extra care:

- For young babies, wash bottles in hot soapy water and sterilise using sterilising solution or a steam steriliser.
- When adding water to baby foods, milks and other drinks always use cooled, boiled water.
- Cook foods thoroughly until piping hot and cool rapidly until comfortable to eat.
- Cook eggs until the white and yolk are solid or use pasteurised egg products.

Extra care with barbecues

Cooking food outdoors, particularly for large groups, can increase the risk of food poisoning. It's harder to keep foods very hot or very cold and to keep everything clean. But with a little extra care barbecues can be safe as well as fun.

Light the barbecue well in advance, make sure you use enough charcoal and wait until it is glowing red (with a powdery grey surface) before starting to cook.

Keep meats, salads and other perishable food in the fridge, or in a cool bag with ice packs, until just before you are ready to cook/eat them. Serve salads at the last minute.

Ideally use separate cool bags for raw meats and ready-to-eat foods. Cool bags can only keep food cool for a limited period so cook sooner rather than later. Better still, if possible, fully pre-cook all poultry and sausages in the microwave or oven then take them straight to the barbecue to add the final barbecue flavour.

During cooking, turn food often. If it starts to burn on the outside raise the grill height or reduce the heat of the charcoal (dampen coals slightly or partially close air vents). As always, cook poultry, burgers, pork and sausages throughout - no pink bits in the middle.

Keep raw and cooked foods apart at all times. Don't handle cooked foods with utensils that have touched raw meats and don't put cooked or ready-to-eat foods (eg salad and bread) on plates that have held raw meats.

Keep serving bowls covered to protect them from dust, insects and pets.