

food safety guidelines

Food safety is an important issue at all times and even more so when entertaining. Some individuals are more at risk than others from food poisoning, such as pregnant women, the elderly and anyone with an illness, and special care should be taken when preparing food for these people. Here are a few suggestions to help you prevent this dangerous situation from occurring:

Cooking

Inadequate cooking of food is a common cause of food poisoning. Most foods, especially meat, poultry and eggs, should be cooked thoroughly to kill food poisoning bacteria. In general, food should be cooked to a temperature of at least 75°C or hotter, as heating food to this temperature kills most food-poisoning bacteria. If you have a food thermometer, check the temperature during the cooking process. When the food is cooked, it should be eaten promptly or kept hotter than 60°C, or covered and stored in the fridge or freezer.

Bacteria grows more easily on some food than others. These high-risk foods include:

- Meat
- Poultry
- Dairy Products
- Eggs
- Smallgoods such as ham and salami
- Seafood
- Cooked rice and pasta

Extra special care should be taken with these foods, especially keeping them out of the temperature “danger zone” of between 5°C and 60°C.

Note that steaks, chops and whole roasts can be cooked to your preference as the food-poisoning bacteria are mostly on the surface. However, it is important that mince, sausages, whole chickens or stuffed meats are cooked right through to the centre and that the juices run clear.

Be careful never to put cooked meat onto the same plate that you had the raw meat without washing and drying it well first. This is quite common at barbeques.

Cooling and Storing

When storing cooked food for later use, cover the food and store it in the fridge (which is at 5°C or below) as soon as it stops steaming. This helps put the food out of the danger zone temperatures as quickly as possible. If you need to keep the food warm, ensure it is hotter than 60°C. Under ideal conditions, food can generally be kept in the refrigerator for a few days. However, if you wish to keep cooked food longer, freeze it as soon as it has cooled in the fridge. Always store cooked food separately from raw food.

Reheating

When reheating food heat it until steaming hot - above 75°C or, preferably, boiling. Food should steam throughout, not just on the edges. Take care when reheating food in a microwave oven, as the food can heat unevenly. Stir and rotate the food during the reheating process.

Keep Clean

Bacteria can spread from hands to utensils to working surfaces, so without stating the obvious it is important that you wash your hands well before handling food. Ensure that chopping boards, utensils and work surfaces are clean and dry.

Separate

Ensure that raw meat and poultry is kept separate from other foods. When storing or defrosting raw meat in the fridge, ensure it is on a plate so that the juices don't drip onto other foods. The bacteria on the raw meat will be killed when you cook it, but if they have mixed with other foods that are not cooked, they will still be active.