
Food safety outdoors

Summary

- Always keep perishable foods well refrigerated until needed or in a cooler kept cold with ice or ice packs.
 - Avoid handling food in the outdoors by cutting or preparing it before you leave home.
 - Always use separate plates and equipment to handle raw foods.
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Food poisoning is a real risk when taking food outside the home. Taking food out of its regular environment such as the fridge, freezer, pantry or clean kitchen for long periods of time can mean a greater risk of contamination. Take extra care with packed lunches for work and school, picnics and eating outdoors, especially in warm weather.

Eating outdoors and the risk of food poisoning

Eating outdoors is a great way to enjoy the Australian climate, but it can bring added risks because:

- Bacteria grow more easily when food is stored in the 'temperature danger zone' of between 5 °C and 60 °C.
- Facilities for cleaning and hand washing may be inadequate, and clean water is not always available.
- Food can be exposed to contamination from insects, pests, animals and dust.

High-risk foods

Food poisoning bacteria grow more easily on some foods than others. These high-risk foods include:

- Raw and cooked meat, including poultry such as chicken and turkey, and foods containing these, such as casseroles, curries and lasagne
- Dairy products, such as custard and dairy-based desserts like custard tarts and cheesecake
- Eggs and egg products, such as quiche
- Small goods such as hams and salamis
- Seafood, such as seafood salad, patties, fish balls, stews containing seafood and fish stock
- Cooked rice and pasta
- Prepared salads like coleslaws, pasta salads and rice salads
- Prepared fruit salads
- Ready to eat foods, including sandwiches, rolls, and pizza that contain any of the foods above.

Some people are more at risk of food poisoning

Some people are more at risk of getting food poisoning than others. Special care should be taken with their food. Vulnerable groups include:

- Pregnant women
- The elderly
- Young children
- People with chronic disease.

Home barbeques and outdoor cooking

Some practical hints for keeping food safe to eat when you have a barbeque at home are:

- Keep the meat in the fridge until you are ready to start cooking.
 - Store raw meats and poultry separate from cooked items, and underneath other food so that raw juices do not contaminate other food.
 - Cook food to at least 75 °C. Use a meat thermometer to check the final temperature. Using a thermometer is
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the best way to ensure that meats are properly cooked. If you don't have one, you should cook poultry until the meat is white – there should be no pink flesh. Similarly, if there is no thermometer, cook hamburgers, mince, sausages and other meats right through until any juices run clear.

- Never buy cracked or dirty eggs and always thoroughly cook any food made from eggs.
- Use a clean plate for all cooked meats – don't re-use the same plate or container that held raw meats. Don't use the same equipment used to cook raw food (such as tongs or forks) to handle cooked food.
- Take salads, pates, dips and other perishables outside only when required, and return them to the fridge when that part of the meal is finished.
- Throw out any high-risk food left in the temperature danger zone for more than four hours. Don't put it in the fridge and don't leave it for later.
- Cover food and keep birds, insects and animals away from it.

Preparing food for outdoors

When planning a picnic, making packed lunches or preparing for any other occasion where you are eating away from home, be aware of the basic food safety rule – keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

You should also:

- Store any raw meat in an insulated cooler kept cold with ice or ice packs, away from other food.
- Cut and prepare all meats and salads beforehand to reduce the need to handle foods when you are outdoors.
- Place containers with raw meat or other high-risk foods into separate leak-proof containers and then into a cooler kept cold with ice or ice packs.
- Make sure all cooked foods are completely cooled before you pack them in the cooler.
- Use plenty of ice or cold packs around the food. Frozen drinks can serve as icepacks, especially in packed school lunches.
- Travel with the cooler on the floor of the car, out of sunlight. Cover the cooler with a blanket for extra insulation.

Camping food safety tips

Perishable foods are generally unsuitable for camping unless you have access to a fridge. It is best to take dry, UHT and canned products. Other tips for camping include:

- If you want to take some meat with you, frozen meats can be stored in a cooler with ice bricks for up to two days and pre-cooked meals, such as frozen stews, for up to one day.
- Cover the cooler with a wet bag to promote evaporative cooling.
- Divide the food into meal-size portions and pack it according to when you plan to eat it so that you can get what you need quickly.
- Make sure you cook or heat all food well, to at least 75 °C.
- Boil drinking water before use, or use disinfecting tablets.

General cleanliness tips

Cleanliness is always important, but it's especially important when you're preparing food outside the home. Remember to:

- Wash your hands before and after handling raw foods. Wash your hands with clean water and soap, and dry them with clean towels or disposable towels.
- Consider using disposable wipes or a hand sanitiser if there is no safe water.
- Keep the outdoor area or campsite as clean as possible.
- Keep food sealed and covered – birds, insects and animals can be a source of food poisoning bacteria.

Where to get help

- Food Safety Hotline Tel. 1300 364 352
- Department of Health and Human Services - '[Your guide to food safety](#)' brochure

- Your local council health department

Things to remember

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- Always use separate plates and equipment to handle raw foods.

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

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