Food Safety For Consumers

Environmental Health Guide

We all need food, but is it safe to eat? Can we make it last longer and not cause disease? Unsafe food handling can lead to food poisoning. Food poisoning can be prevented by taking care when buying, storing and handling food. Careful handling keeps food safe and makes it last longer.

Buying Food

To protect your health buy the best quality food you can, and always check the following:

- **Packaging –** avoid damaged cans and torn packets.

- **Labelling –** is the product near its use-by date? How should it be stored? Follow the recommended storage conditions e.g. REFRIGERATE AFTER OPENING.

- **Perishable food –** avoid dairy products, meat, fish, poultry, etc. stored out of refrigerators or above the loadline in freezers.

- **Transporting perishable food** – plan your shopping trip so perishable foods are purchased last. Transport in an esky and place them in a refrigerator or freezer as soon as possible.

Storing Food

Following these easy steps will help protect your food:

- **Keep food covered** to protect it from dust, insects, sneezes, etc. Always use a clean cover – never re-use plastic or aluminium wrap.

- **Keep raw food separated from cooked food.** Always wrap foods and store **cooked foods above raw** foods in the refrigerator.

- **Keep perishable foods hot (above 60°C) or cold (below 5°C).** Check the temperature of your refrigerator regularly. In hot weather it may need adjusting to keep food cold.

- **Arrange food in your refrigerator so cold air can easily circulate around it**. Never overstock the refrigerator. Refrigerators work better and are cheaper to run if they are defrosted regularly.

Time and Temperature Control:

High-risk foods include dairy products, meat, poultry, fish, seafood, etc. Bacteria grow easily on these foods and need time in the right conditions to multiply to dangerous levels. Bacteria grow best at temperatures between 5°C and 60°C. This temperature range is known as the **'temperature danger zone'**.

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To stop bacteria growing:

- Always keep high risk foods:

    - **above 60 °C** (e.g. roasts, stews, casseroles, soups, curries, etc.) or

    - **below 5°C** (e.g. sliced meats, desserts, dairy products, sandwiches, salads, etc.)

- Never leave high-risk food out at room temperature.

- Always defrost frozen food in the refrigerator or in a microwave oven set on 'defrost'.

- Make sure food is cooked thoroughly. Joints of meat, poultry, etc. should reach at least 75°C in the centre. This will kill most harmful bacteria.

- Cook food and serve immediately. If you must cool food, place it in small, shallow containers to allow for rapid cooling before refrigerating.

KEEP HIGH-RISK FOOD OUT OF THE TEMPERATURE DANGER ZONE

Handling Food

Bacteria cannot move on their own – they must be carried from one place to another.

Bacteria are spread by poor food handling practices or by contact with pets, flies or other pests. **Keep pets out of the kitchen when preparing food.**

To stop the spread of bacteria:
- **Always wash your hands** thoroughly with soap and hot water before handling food, especially before handling cooked food.

- **Use separate cutting boards** and knives for each type of food e.g. raw meat, fish, vegetables and cooked foods.

- **Always clean and sanitise** work surfaces and utensils. Sanitisers kill bacteria, while detergents only remove dirt and grease.

- **Avoid using bare hands** to touch food. Use tongs, forks and spoons whenever possible.

- **Use paper towels whenever possible.** Dishcloths and towels can carry bacteria.

Further Information

For further information contact your local government Environmental Health Officer
or
Environmental Health Directorate
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