



FACT SHEET

FOOD SAFETY BASICS

Practicing food safe behaviour is essential when preparing meals and food parcels. When working with vulnerable population groups, food safety is critical as they may be at higher risk of food poisoning than others. These fact sheets give an overview of the topic, though we encourage you to participate in further food safety courses.

WHAT ARE BACTERIA?

Bacteria are tiny organisms that are found throughout the environment.

There are many different types of bacteria that can:

- be good for your health, such as the ones found in natural yoghurt
- spoil food but not harm your health
- make you sick

Food poisoning occurs when sufficient numbers of particular types of bacteria, or their toxins, are present in the food you eat. These bacteria are called pathogens.

QUICK FACTS

- Each day in Australia 11,500 people become sick with food poisoning costing Australia around \$2.6 billion per year.¹

Symptoms vary in severity; the most common symptoms are vomiting and diarrhoea, stomach cramps, headaches and fever. Some food poisoning bacteria can cause more serious symptoms, including kidney failure, paralysis and death.

WHICH FOODS ARE HIGH RISK?

Some foods are considered to be higher risk foods as they provide the ideal conditions for bacteria to multiply.² However food contamination is not just limited to foods considered at higher risk. Prepared fruits, vegetables and salads can also pose a food poisoning risk. Take extra caution when using or preparing the following ingredients to minimise the risk of food poisoning.

HIGH RISK FOODS INCLUDE:

- eggs and egg products (such as quiche)
- raw and cooked meat
- dairy products
- seafood and meals containing seafood
- cooked rice and pasta
- prepared salads (rice, pasta or vegetable) and fruit salads



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¹ McKay, I. Australia and New Zealand Food Authority Report. FSANZ: Canberra; 1999.

² Food Safety Information Council. How to handle riskier foods safely. [Cited 24/1/2014]. Available from: <http://www.foodsafety.asn.au/resources>



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VULNERABLE PEOPLE

Some people are more likely to get sick from food poisoning and have more severe symptoms.³ People most at risk of food poisoning are:

- children under 5 years of age
- adults over 70 years of age
- pregnant women
- people with compromised immune systems, who are already sick with another illness.

Although food safety and safe food handling practices are always important, vulnerable people may be at higher risk of food poisoning so extra care should be taken. It is important to be even more careful when catering for these groups.

THE TEMPERATURE DANGER ZONE

Controlling the temperature of food is vital to preventing food poisoning. Bacteria don't like to be too hot or too cold. Below 5°C bacteria will multiply very slowly and above 60°C they will die off. Bacteria also do not grow while food is frozen, but they will begin to multiply again as soon as the food is above 5°C.

To minimise bacteria growth, it is recommended that food is kept out of the 'temperature danger zone' as much as possible.

PREVENTING FOOD POISONING

Bacteria need time and a temperature between 5°C and 60°C (known as the temperature danger zone) to multiply to harmful numbers.



When left in the temperature danger zone, the number of bacteria can double every 20 minutes. For example:

- If a food is contaminated with only one bacteria, in seven hours it will have multiplied to 2 million bacteria and 17 million in eight hours.
- If a food is contaminated with 1,000 bacteria, in just a few hours they will have multiplied to high enough numbers to make someone sick.

³ Food Safety Information Council. How to handle riskier foods safely. [Cited 24/1/2014]. Available from: <http://www.foodsafety.asn.au/resources>



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FOOD LEGISLATION

Each state and territory has its own food legislation. It is important to note that in some places, specific food laws apply to activities undertaken by community groups and not-for profit organisations. This is nothing to be scared about, the laws essentially require food to be stored, handled and prepared in a safe and suitable manner. As each state and territory is different; we strongly encourage you to be aware of the food legislation in your area and contact your food safety department to discuss if you are unsure.

ALLERGENS

If your CFP is providing cooked meals (i.e. foods without labelling and allergen declaration) read the Food Allergen Report in the link below. It is strongly encouraged that you disclose any allergens present within foods (bright stickers work well). This is so that IF someone did have a reaction, you can demonstrate that all efforts were made to provide adequate information.

www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/downloads/food_allergen_report.pdf

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Look up your state or territory guidelines.
- **Food Standards Code** – Chapter 3 provides national legal minimum standard for all food businesses to ensure that only safe and suitable food is sold in Australia. ‘Safe Food Australia’ is a guide to the Food Standards Code; it gives advice for businesses food safety. It is a good reference document written in plain language. The Food Standards Code and jurisdiction legislation are both something to be aware of and take on board. However, as a CFP, you would not necessarily be prosecuted under either of them.
- **‘Do food safely’** – A free food safety learning program developed by the Victorian Government. <http://dofoodsafely.health.vic.gov.au/>
- **Better Health Channel** – provides simple factsheets on food safety which can be printed out for volunteers. http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Food_safety_storage?open



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FOOD CONTAMINATION

TYPES OF CONTAMINATION

There are three types of contamination food must be protected from.¹

Type of contamination	Examples	How to prevent contamination
Physical	Band-Aid Glass Hair Jewellery Rodent droppings Dirt	Cover wounds with gloves or waterproof dressings Don't use glass in the kitchen. Cover foods with cling film. Tie long hair back (and when possible encourage use of hair nets). Don't wear jewellery other than a plain wedding band. Wrap or use lidded containers. Wash fresh produce.
Biological	Bacteria Viruses Moulds Yeasts	Ensure food handlers regularly wash hands with soap and warm water. Keep food out of the temperature danger zone (5°-60°C). Cover food. Promote good personal hygiene of food handlers (do not touch face with hands). Keep food refrigerated. Prepare food close to service time.
Chemical	Cleaning chemicals Insecticides Allergens	Store cleaning chemicals away from food. Refrain from spraying fly spray around food. Be aware of ingredients and keeping allergens separate.

CROSS CONTAMINATION

This refers to the transfer of bacteria from one food item to another. For example if a person who has been handling raw chicken touches lettuce leaves, the bacteria from the raw chicken will transfer onto the leaves. To avoid this keep raw and cooked foods separate; store in separate containers, use separate utensils and equipment, always wash your hands when moving from raw to cooked food. It is also essential to keep raw meats and vegetables separate using the same techniques.



¹ Food Safety Information Council. Food Safety Tips at a glance. [Cited 21/1/2014]. Available from: <http://www.foodsafety.asn.au/resources>



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PREPARING SAFE FOOD

Food safety is in your hands, keeping foods safe can be quick and easy. There are many stages in the food preparation process which can provide an opportunity to incorporate safe food handling. A few simple practical precautions can drastically reduce the risk of food poisoning.

TABLE 1: A GUIDE TO PREPARING FOOD SAFELY¹

Step	Guide
Hand washing	<p>It is essential that people who handle food have clean hands.</p> <p>To wash hands:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use soap to work up a lather • Wash palms, fingers, thumbs, nails and wrists • Rinse off soap by washing hands under running warm water for at least 20 seconds • Wet hands are more likely to carry bacteria so dry hands with paper towel. Never wipe wet hands on clothes or cleaning cloths <p>Hands must be washed often, including after:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating and drinking; using the toilet; coughing or sneezing; touching hair or face; handling any food that may contaminate any other food including, raw food and allergens. <p>NOTE: Hand sanitising gels can be used after hand washing but cannot be used to replace hand washing with soap and water.</p>
Illness	<p>People with an illness like vomiting, diarrhoea, sore throat with fever or jaundice could be carrying a foodborne illness and must not handle food until they have not had symptoms for 48 hours.</p>
Date Codes ²	<p>There is an important difference between ‘use-by’ and ‘best-before’ dates.</p> <p>A ‘use-by’ date indicates safety, DO NOT use foods past their ‘use-by’ date. Foods that have this date are usually ready-to-eat foods like ham, cooked chicken, dairy products.</p> <p>A ‘best-before’ date is an indicator of quality only, and foods are still safe to eat after the date as long as they are not damaged, deteriorated or perished. The product may have lost some of the quality. Common foods with a ‘best-before’ date include canned foods, frozen foods, biscuits, sauces or chocolate.</p> <p>If cans have no date, it means they are considered safe for 2 years or longer.</p>

1 Food Safety Information Council. Handwashing. [Cited 24/1/2014]. Available from: <http://www.foodsafety.asn.au/resources>

2 Food Standards Australia New Zealand. Standard 1.2.5 – Date Marking of Food. Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. Canberra:2010.



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Step	Guide
Choosing foods	<p>Don't choose foods that are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past their 'use-by' date. • In damaged packaging. • Missing the ingredients list or date code. <p>If you use donated food, see the Fact sheet: Safe Food Donation.</p> <p>The golden rule – If in doubt, throw it out!</p>
Storage	<p>Keep storage areas clean and tidy.</p> <p>Look out for signs of pests such as rodent droppings, webs, gnawed packaging.</p> <p>Keep the refrigerator running at 5°C or below, use a thermometer to check.</p> <p>Use the 'first in first out' principal to ensure food is not wasted by going out of date while newer foods are being used.</p> <p>Cover all foods when storing. Store raw meats safely in containers towards the bottom of the refrigerator.</p> <p>Wait until steam has stopped rising from the food before covering and putting in the refrigerator.</p>
Preparation	<p>Use separate chopping boards to avoid contamination. Colour co-ordinate chopping boards to help with this, i.e. red – raw meat, blue – raw seafood, yellow – cooked meat, green – fruit and vegetables, white – dairy and bakery. If you don't have different chopping boards, make sure you wash the chopping board when changing food groups.</p> <p>Wash fruits and vegetables before use.</p> <p>Avoid touching ready to eat foods like salads and desserts with your bare hands. Wear gloves or use tongs to handle and serve food.</p> <p>Prepare food as close to service time as possible.</p> <p>Don't let food hang around in the temperature danger zone.</p> <p>Defrost and marinate foods in the fridge.</p>
Cooking	<p>Cook food to 75°C in the centre (use a thermometer to check).</p> <p>Use a temperature probe to check solid foods; liquid food should reach a rolling boil.</p> <p>Cut food into even size pieces so they cook at the same times.</p>
Cooling	<p>When preparing meals in advance ensure the food gets to below 5°C within 6 hours.</p> <p>Don't over pack the refrigerator, food needs space around for the cool air to circulate and keep it cold.</p> <p>If refrigeration isn't available, only prepare food just prior to service.</p> <p>After cooking, cool food as quickly as possible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put food in the fridge as soon as steam has stopped rising. • Use shallow containers to cool the food.
Serving	<p>Don't use bare hands to serve food; use tongs or gloves or similar.</p> <p>Wash hands before serving food.</p> <p>Make sure food kept hot for service is above 60°C.</p>



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Step	Guide
Cleaning and sanitising	<p>Cleaning and sanitising are different. Cleaning is removing all the visible dirt and grease from a surface. Sanitising is the process of killing the bacteria on the surface. It is essential to clean equipment before sanitising and to complete both steps.</p> <p>You need to sanitise everything that has had direct contact with food, like cups, cutlery, knives, chopping boards etc.</p> <p>The easiest way to sanitise is using a dishwasher, but boiling water or a weak bleach solution can also be used.</p>
Kitchen equipment	<p>Make sure the equipment you are using cannot cause contamination. Replace damaged equipment as soon as possible.</p>
Training of food handlers	<p>People who handle food must have adequate food safety skills and knowledge.</p> <p>Look up various courses at http://www.foodsafety.edu.au/</p>
Allergies and intolerances	<p>There is an important difference between allergies and intolerances. An allergy causes symptoms like hives, rash and anaphylaxis which can be fatal. One in 20 Australians has a potentially fatal food allergy and even traces of an allergen can cause anaphylaxis.</p> <p>An intolerance produces uncomfortable symptoms, like upset stomach or bloating and is unpleasant but not fatal.</p> <p>Some tips for dealing with allergens:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have ingredients lists handy so you can give information about the food you are serving. • Check product labels carefully or give the client the information to check themselves. • Do not take any chances. • When cooking foods for charities i.e. soup kitchen, request food donors provide a list of ingredients. <p>Further information: Anaphylaxis Australia www.allergyfacts.org.au</p>

Remember these four simple steps for food safety:

- Clean – Wash hands, utensils and surfaces regularly
- Cook food to acceptable temperatures
- Chill – Refrigerate food promptly
- Separate – Don't cross contaminate





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SAFE FOOD DONATIONS

As highlighted in Fact sheet: Food Safety Basics, individuals experiencing food insecurity are at increased risk of food borne illnesses. To minimise this risk, when accepting donated food it is recommended that you ensure the food is safe before passing it on or using it.

MAKING SURE THE FOOD IS SAFE¹

- Take care when handling, storing, packing and transporting food.
- Store donated food in clean, covered food-grade containers.
- Where possible, keep high-risk foods such as: meat, seafood, poultry, eggs, dairy products and small goods, or foods which contain these ingredients, such as sandwiches, quiches and prepared salads, below 5°C or above 60°C and out of the Temperature Danger Zone while being transported (check out Fact sheet: Food Safety Basics for more information on the Temperature Danger Zone).
- Throw away any high-risk food left in the Temperature Danger Zone for more than 4 hours.
- Ensure that the food is collected by, or delivered to a Community Food Program in the shortest possible time.
- Everyone involved in handling donated food should maintain the highest standard of personal hygiene and cleanliness.



DO NOT ACCEPT

- Food past 'use-by' date
- Blown cans (swollen due to a build-up of gas) or cans with dents on the seam or rim – allows air and bacteria to enter the can and food
- Perishable food a long way past its best before i.e. yoghurt and cheeses
- Food that does not have a label with ingredient information and date code
- Food in unsealed packaging

NB: Don't rely on look or smell. Foods that can cause food poisoning can appear safe.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE UNSURE?

1. If required, contact the manufacturer to obtain all of the relevant product information
2. If you still aren't sure then you can contact the Victorian Department of Health Food Safety hotline to speak to a qualified person for advice - 1300 364 352.

WHAT TO DO WITH UNSAFE DONATED FOOD

If you have been donated food you think is unsafe, discard it or put it in your compost bin. Think about having guidelines on your website setting out basic rules for food donors. i.e. ensure the food is safe, has been under temperature control, intact packaging and before 'use-by' date.

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1 Adapted from Department of Human Services. Donating food to charities in Victoria. Victorian Government; 2005 [Cited 24/1/2014]. Available from: http://www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety/downloads/donating_food.pdf



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FOOD SAFETY FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS WITH LIMITED OR NO KITCHEN FACILITIES

Many community members experiencing food insecurity have limited storage and food preparation facilities. In this case, there are specific considerations that should be made when providing emergency food relief:

- Discuss what food preparation facilities are available to community members e.g. refrigerator/freezer.
- Try to plan as much as possible when food will be eaten.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold, as much as possible.
- Canned and powdered foods have long shelf lives and do not need refrigeration, however powdered foods should be covered to minimise risk of contamination.
- Use foods that do not need to be kept cold like bread, tinned products and fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Some foods such as meats can cause food poisoning if they are kept out of the refrigerator for too long. Try and consume these items within 4 hours of purchase.
- Freeze foods where possible to make them last longer.
- Where possible, heat foods until they are bubbling.
- Keep food out of sunlight and away from heaters.
- Include ready-to-eat food like salads which can be eaten straight from packet. Consider providing a plastic fork so clients don't need to take the item home / elsewhere to eat or use their fingers.
- Canned foods can be eaten cold.
- Do not refreeze foods which have already been frozen and only reheat foods once before eating.
- If clients are taking several items to consume later, try and encourage them to take safe items (bread, canned items, powdered items, fruit) and to eat higher risk items (things that need to be kept cold or hot) straight away.
- For high risk foods, consider marking packets using a permanent marker with something like "eat now" or "eat today" or "eat on 8 Feb" if time and staffing permit.

TABLE 1: APPROXIMATE FOOD STORAGE TIMES¹

	Refrigerator	Freezer
Meat	3-4 days	3-6 months
Vegetables	5-7 days	8 months
Bread	7-14 days	2-3 months
Cooked rice	7-14 days	6 months
Leftovers	3-4 days	2-3 months

¹ Nutrition Promotion Unit. Safe Food, Safe Kitchen. Metro South Health Service District. Queensland Government, 2010.