

## Food safety - storage

Food poisoning is frequently caused by bacteria from foods that have been incorrectly stored, prepared, handled or cooked. Food contaminated with food-poisoning bacteria may look, smell and taste normal. If food is not stored properly, the bacteria in it can multiply to dangerous levels.

### Beware of the temperature danger zone

Food-poisoning bacteria grow and multiply fastest in the temperature danger zone between 5 °C and 60 °C. It is important to keep high-risk food out of this temperature zone.

### Take special care with high-risk foods

Food-poisoning bacteria can grow and multiply on some types of food more easily than others. 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
- Smallgoods 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 food above.

Food that comes in packages, cans and jars can become high-risk foods once opened, and should be handled and stored correctly.

### Storing food in the fridge

Your fridge temperature should be at 5 °C or below. The freezer temperature should be below -15 °C. Use a thermometer to check the temperature in your fridge.

### Freezing food safely

When shopping, buy chilled and frozen foods at the end of your trip and take them home to store as quickly as possible. On hot days or for trips longer than 30 minutes, try to take an insulated cooler bag or icepack to keep frozen foods cold. Keep hot and cold foods separate while you take them home.

When you arrive home, put chilled and frozen foods into the fridge or freezer immediately. Make sure foods stored in the freezer are frozen hard.

### Storing cooked food safely

When you have cooked food and want to cool it:

- Put hot food into shallow dishes or smaller portions to help cool the food as quickly as possible.

- Don't put very hot food into the refrigerator. Wait until steam has stopped rising from the food before putting it in the fridge.

## **Avoid refreezing thawed food**

Food-poisoning bacteria can grow in frozen food while it is thawing, so avoid thawing frozen food in the temperature danger zone. Keep defrosted food in the fridge until it is ready to be cooked. If using a microwave oven to defrost food, cook it immediately after defrosting.

As a general rule, avoid refreezing thawed food. Food that is frozen a second time is likely to have higher levels of food-poisoning bacteria. The risk depends on the condition of the food when frozen, and how the food is handled between thawing and refreezing, but raw food should never be refrozen once thawed.

## **Store raw food separately from cooked food**

Raw food and cooked food should be stored separately in the fridge. Bacteria from raw food can contaminate cold cooked food, and the bacteria can multiply to dangerous levels if the food is not cooked thoroughly again.

Always store raw food in sealed or covered containers at the bottom of the fridge. Keep raw foods below cooked foods, to avoid liquid such as meat juices dripping down and contaminating the cooked food.

## **Choose strong, non-toxic food storage containers**

Make sure your food storage containers are clean and in good condition, and only use them for storing food. Cover them with tight-fitting lids, foil or plastic film to minimise potential contamination. Transfer the contents of opened cans into suitable containers.

## **If in doubt, throw it out**

Throw out high-risk food left in the temperature danger zone for more than four hours – don't put it in the fridge and don't keep it for later. Check the use-by dates on food products and discard out-of-date food. If you are uncertain of the use-by date, throw it out.

## **Where to get help**

- Food Safety Hotline Tel. 1300 364 352
- Your local council health department

## **Things to remember**

- Keep high-risk food at 5 °C or below and above 60 °C to avoid the temperature danger zone.
- Store raw foods below cooked foods.
- Store food in suitable, covered containers.
- Avoid refreezing thawed foods.
- Check and observe the use-by dates on food products.
- Take special care with high-risk foods.

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

DH - RHP&R - Health Protection - Food Safety and Regulation

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