



## Food Poisoning

Each year, at least two million Australians suffer from food poisoning at an estimated cost of \$2 billion to the community. Food poisoning occurs when sufficient numbers of particular types of bacteria, toxins or chemicals are present in the food you eat. These bacteria are called pathogens.

### What causes food poisoning?

The most common cause is bacteria. Food borne illness occurs when food poisoning bacteria contaminate food and multiply to dangerous levels, due to poor food handling and storage. In order to multiply to these levels bacteria need food, warmth, moisture and time.

There are two types of bacteria: those that spoil food and those that cause food poisoning.

Some people wrongly believe food poisoning bacteria will make food smell, taste and look bad. Even food that smells, tastes and looks good can make you sick!

Bacteria love to breed in the following foods which are also referred to as high risk foods. High risk foods are likely to cause food poisoning if not stored, prepared or cooked properly.

Potentially 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 foods above; and
- Fermented foods.

### High risk groups for food poisoning

Some people are more at risk of getting food poisoning than others. Take special care when buying, storing and preparing food for these people. Vulnerable groups include pregnant women; the elderly; young children; and people with chronic illness.

### Common contributors to food poisoning

- Inadequate refrigeration - store high risk food at 5°C or less.
- Food stored at room temperature - minimise the time high risk food is stored at room temperature (a maximum of four hours).
- Food prepared too far in advance - can increase the likelihood of contamination and time in the 'danger zone'.
- Inadequate cooling – cool food quickly in small batches.
- Inadequate re-heating – heat food quickly to over 60°C to destroy bacteria.
- Inadequate thawing – ensure raw meat such as poultry is thawed thoroughly so the cooking process heats the internal temperature to over 60°C, destroying naturally present bacteria.
- Poor housekeeping – clean premises reduce the number of bacteria that can be transferred during food preparation.
- Cross contamination – good food handling practices will reduce the likelihood of cross contamination.
- Contaminated processed food – use reputable suppliers to ensure you receive good quality food.
- Poor personal hygiene – ensure staff know and practice good personal hygiene habits.

## Preparing food to avoid food poisoning

When you prepare food:

- Wash your hands in warm, soapy water before preparing food.
- Do not use the same cutting board for raw food that will be used for cooked (meat) and foods that are served raw (such as salads). This reduces the chances of cross contamination of food.
- Most food should be cooked to a temperature of at least 75°C.
- Check the cooking temperature with a thermometer. If you don't have one, make sure you cook poultry until the meat is white, particularly near the bone. Cook hamburgers, mince, rolled roasts and sausages right through until their juices run clear. Cook white fish until it flakes easily with a fork.

When you store food:

- Separate raw food from cooked food and store raw food at the bottom of the fridge to avoid juices dripping onto and contaminating other food.
- Set your fridge temperature below 5°C and your freezer below -15°C.
- Allow cooked foods to cool to room temperature (about 21°C) before storing in the refrigerator. (This should not take more than two hours – cooling will be quicker if you put the hot food into a number of smaller containers rather than leaving it in one large one.) This prevents the refrigerator temperature from rising and reduces the risk of bacterial growth in all food stored in the fridge.
- Cover all food with lids, tin foil or plastic wrap and don't store food in opened tin cans.

## Symptoms of food poisoning

The symptoms of food poisoning may vary depending on the type of bacteria causing the illness. Symptoms can range from mild to very severe. They can occur almost immediately after eating, or a number of hours later, and they can last from 24 hours to five days.

When you get sick, you usually experience one or more of:

- nausea
- stomach cramps
- diarrhoea
- vomiting
- fever
- headaches

Food poisoning can also lead to other long-term illnesses and symptoms. If you experience some of these symptoms and think you have food poisoning, see your doctor as soon as possible. If you think the illness is related to eating out at a restaurant or café, or from food purchased from a shop or take-away outlet, you can also report your illness to Queensland Health on 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84) 24 hours seven days a week.

Please contact Gladstone Regional Council's Regulatory Services Division on (07) 4977 6821 if you require further information on this topic.

### How can you contact us?



(07) 4970 0700

STD CALLS: 1300 733 343

For those residents who currently incur STD call rates when contacting their local customer service centre



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