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Standards
Agency
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THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO SAFE SUMMER FOOD

Summer is the perfect chance to enjoy picnics and barbecues with family and friends. We have put together some advice to help ensure you don't become unwell when enjoying eating outdoors.

Many people assume food poisoning comes from restaurants, cafes and fast food outlets, but it's also possible to get ill from food prepared at home. The UK has an estimated 1,000,000 cases of food poisoning every year. The risk of getting food poisoning from *Campylobacter*, *Listeria*, *Salmonella* and some *E. coli* rises over the summer months.

New research from the Food Standards Agency¹ indicates people could be putting themselves and their families at risk through lack of knowledge of the 4Cs of food hygiene: Chilling, Cooking, Cleaning and avoiding Cross-contamination.

If you've ever had food poisoning, you'll know how unpleasant it can be, even for a fit and healthy person. For children, people already in ill-health and older people, food poisoning can have serious, and sometimes even deadly, consequences. It's important to protect your loved ones from foodborne illness this summer by handling food safely when eating outdoors. The 4Cs of food hygiene, as laid out in this guide, can help prevent most forms of foodborne disease.

Read on for summer food safety advice from the Food Standards Agency for barbecues and picnics, and tips on defrosting and dealing with leftovers safely. It's the little things you do that can help to stop you and your family becoming unwell.

Recent research shows people are putting themselves at risk of food poisoning:

48% of people say that they *never* check their fridge temperature

37% of people said they *did not* know what the fridge temperature should be

58% of people defrost meat or fish by *leaving it* at room temperature

19% of people *admit* to eating rare burgers at least some of the time

¹ <https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/food-and-you-w4-combined-report.pdf>

THE 4Cs OF SUMMER FOOD SAFETY

The key actions to remember this summer fit into four easy-to-remember categories:

1 CHILLING & DEFROSTING

Chilling food properly helps stop harmful bacteria from growing, especially in the warm summer months. So, make sure you do the following things:

- Do not defrost foods at room temperature. Ideally food should be defrosted fully in the fridge or if this is not possible, using a microwave on the defrost setting directly before cooking.
- Cool cooked foods at room temperature and then place in the fridge within one to two hours.
- Store raw foods separately from ready-to-eat foods and place them covered on the bottom shelf of your fridge.
- Keep chilled food out of the fridge for the shortest time possible during preparation.
- Any food with a 'use by' date, pre-cooked dishes, salads and desserts all need to be kept chilled and out of the sun until serving time.
- At barbecues and picnics, cold perishable food should be kept in the fridge or a cool box until serving time.
- Check regularly that your fridge is cold enough - it should be below 5°C.



Some foods need to be kept in the fridge to help slow down germs' growth and keep food fresh and safe for longer.

Generally, the colder the temperature the slower germs will grow, but cold temperatures don't stop germs growing altogether. Consider using a fridge thermometer to check the temperature is below 5°C as your fridge's dials are not usually an indication of the temperature.



2 COOKING

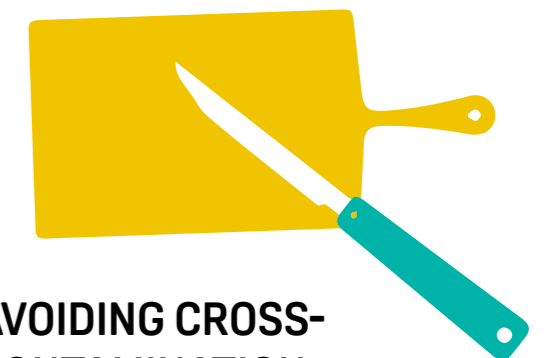
Cooking food at the right temperature and for the correct length of time will ensure that any harmful bacteria are killed. This is particularly important when cooking minced meat products such as beef burgers, sausages and kebabs as well as pork, turkey and chicken:

- Always check that:
 - The meat is steaming hot throughout.
 - There is no pink meat visible when you cut into the thickest part.
 - Meat juices run clear.
- Burgers prepared at home should always be cooked all the way through until steaming hot. They should not be served rare or pink because harmful bacteria may be present in the middle of the burger, causing food poisoning.
- Once served, dishes should not sit out for longer than two hours, or one hour if it's very hot outside.

3 CLEANING

Effective cleaning removes bacteria on hands, equipment and surfaces, helping to stop harmful bacteria from spreading onto food. These three tips will help keep germs at bay:

- **Hands:** Wash hands before cooking and eating where possible. If you're at a picnic and it's not possible to wash your hands, use a wet wipe to clean your hands, then use a sanitiser on top to sterilise them.
- **Utensils and serving dishes:** Take care to keep all utensils and platters clean when preparing food and ensure you don't mix those used to prepare raw and ready-to-eat dishes.
- **Cook it, don't wash it:** Don't wash raw chicken or any other meat; it just splashes germs onto your hands, clothes, utensils and worktops. Thorough cooking will kill any bacteria present.



4 AVOIDING CROSS-CONTAMINATION

Cross-contamination is most likely to happen when raw food touches (or drips onto) ready-to-eat food, utensils or surfaces. Prevent it by following these tips:

- Store raw meat separately from ready-to-eat foods.
- Use different utensils, plates and chopping boards for raw and cooked food.
- Wash your hands after touching raw meat and before you handle ready-to-eat food.
- Do not prepare food for others if you are unwell.

ESSENTIAL TIPS FOR THE FAIR WEATHER GRILLER

Barbecues are fun. Food poisoning isn't. Follow the FSA's top tips to stop food poisoning in its tracks.

- 1. Pre-cook.** Consider cooking all chicken and pork in the oven prior to giving it a final 'finish' on your barbecue where possible. Your friends and family will still experience that special barbecue 'chargrilled' taste – and you will know that you've cooked the chicken all the way through. This technique can also be used for sausages, burgers and kebabs if you're cooking for large numbers.
- 2. Charred on the outside doesn't always mean cooked on the inside.** Cut open and check your burgers, sausages and chicken. Turning meat regularly and moving it around on the barbecue will also help to cook it evenly. If in doubt, keep cooking. Remember that most types of meat are safe to eat only when:
 - the meat is steaming hot throughout
 - there is no pink meat visible when you cut into the thickest part
 - any juices run clear
- 3. Remember, disposable barbecues take longer to heat up and to cook food.** Don't overload the barbecue and always check that your meat is cooked thoroughly.
- 4. Avoid cross-contamination by storing raw meat separately before cooking.** Use different utensils, plates and chopping boards for raw and cooked food. Always wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water and dry them before and after handling food.
- 5. Keep plates and cutlery away from raw meat and fish.** And never reuse a marinade used on raw meat, unless you give it a thorough cook first. You'll only be serving up bugs along with that extra flavour to your guests!
- 6. Keep cold foods below 5°C and hot foods above 63°C.** And don't leave food that you would store refrigerated standing around in the warm, before serving.

33% of people *worry* about food hygiene at BBQs



Don't eat rare burgers. A rare beef burger is 3 times more likely to contain harmful E. coli than a well-cooked burger. Burgers served less than fully cooked can remain contaminated with harmful bacteria, such as E. coli. Burgers are not like steak or other whole cuts of beef and lamb; harmful bacteria from the surface of the raw meat will be spread all the way through the burger when the meat is minced. These bacteria inside will not be killed if all parts of the burger aren't fully cooked. Burgers should not be served rare or pink if being prepared at home; they should always be cooked all the way through until steaming hot.

ALWAYS REMEMBER...

When you're cooking most types of meat on a barbecue, such as poultry, pork, burgers or sausages, make sure:

- the coals are glowing red with a powdery grey surface before you start cooking, as this means they're hot enough
- frozen meat is properly thawed before you cook it
- you turn the meat regularly and move it around the barbecue to cook it evenly

PROBLEM-FREE PICNICKING

22% of people worry about food going off in the sun at a picnic

When taking food outdoors, it's easy to let your usual practises slip. The time between preparing dishes and eating them tends to be longer than normal, as food is packed up for picnics in the morning and sometimes not eaten until early afternoon.

1 in 10 people often leave picnic food out for more than two hours in the summer

In fact, 1 in 10 people often leave picnic food out for more than two hours in the summer. The FSA advises that food should be left out for no longer than two hours, whether in picnic season or at any other time of year. After this time, foods can become unsafe so plan ahead to keep your food cool until you're ready to eat.

Here's five easy tips to keep food safe when out and about this summer:

1. Clean up first.

Rinse fresh fruits (including those with rinds) and vegetables under running tap water before packing them in the cool box.



2. Keep cold food cold.

Place cold food in a cool box with ice or frozen gel packs. Cold food should be stored at below 5°C to prevent bacterial growth.

3. Organise your cool box. Pack drinks in one cool box and perishable foods in another. If using freezer packs (frozen drinks work well for this purpose), distribute them throughout the box – not all at the bottom!

4. Keep your cool box closed. Once at the picnic site, limit the number of times the cool box is opened as much as you can. This helps to keep the contents cold for longer.



5. Pack away your picnic. Once you've served it, dishes should not sit out for longer than two hours, or one hour if it's very hot outside. After this, the risk of bacteria increases and it becomes unsafe to eat, so best to throw it away when you get home. Pack away food so that your guests are not tempted to nibble later. To reduce waste, pre-plan portion sizes according to the size of your party and only pack what you need.



FOOD POISONING: GET TO KNOW THE FACTS AND SYMPTOMS

The easiest way to protect the family from nasty summer 'food bugs' is to store, cook and eat food safely. But, in case you or a loved one gets caught out, it's a good idea to get to know what to look out for. Many people mistakenly think that food poisoning is just a passing tummy bug, but it can be really serious – familiarise yourself with the FSA's guidance so you're in the know.

Summer food poisoning can be attributed to various bugs including **Campylobacter**, **Salmonella**, **Listeria** and some **E. coli**.

Campylobacter is the most common cause of food poisoning in the UK. You can't see, smell or even taste it, but it can lead to people being very ill indeed with abdominal pain, diarrhoea, headache and fever. It can even lead to permanent disability. It is usually found in poultry, meat, dairy products, unpasteurised milk and shellfish and can be spread by cross-contamination, contaminated water or infected animals and their food.

Salmonella is another common bug found in raw meat, undercooked poultry, eggs and unpasteurised milk. Most commonly spread by inadequate cooking and cross-contamination, it leads to diarrhoea, fever, vomiting and stomach pains and it can make you ill for up to three weeks.

E. coli is often passed on through raw and undercooked meats, but can also be spread through other contaminated foods, such as vegetables and salads, water or unpasteurised milk and from person to person. Symptoms can include diarrhoea (about 50% of people infected have bloody diarrhoea), stomach cramps and vomiting and the illness usually lasts between one and five days, although symptoms can persist for up to two weeks. Infection can be more serious in children, particularly those aged 1 to 4 years, when in rarer cases it can lead to haemolytic uraemic syndrome (HUS), a serious condition affecting the kidneys.

Listeria (*L. monocytogenes*) is less common than **Campylobacter** and **Salmonella** but it has a high hospitalisation and mortality rate. Individuals with an increased risk of listeriosis include those over 65 years of age, very young children and babies less than one month old. **Listeria** is particularly dangerous for pregnant women and their unborn babies. **Listeria** causes flu-like symptoms and it is most commonly associated with ready-to-eat foods. Special care should be taken with soft cheeses, smoked fish, meat pates and pre-packed sandwiches.

The symptoms of food poisoning usually begin within a week of eating contaminated food, although they may start at any point between a few hours and several weeks or months later.

The main symptoms include:

- feeling sick (nausea)
- vomiting
- diarrhoea, which may contain blood or mucus
- stomach cramps and tummy pain
- a lack of energy and weakness
- loss of appetite
- a high temperature (fever)
- aching muscles
- chills



What to do:

Most people with food poisoning recover at home and don't need any specific treatment, but we would always advise to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration, especially in the very young or elderly. If your symptoms are severe or don't improve after a few days, it's worth visiting your GP or in England and Wales contacting NHS 111.

For more information see:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Food-poisoning/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/food-poisoning>

