New Zealand Food Safety

Haumaru Kai Aotearoa

Food safety for **hunters**

Ministry for Primary Industries
Manatū Ahu Matua

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Introduction

As New Zealanders we are fortunate to have a wide variety of wild foods at our doorstep. This provides many of us with the opportunity to supplement our table with foods such as wild pork or venison or duck.

The freedom to harvest food from the wild is considered a basic right of New Zealanders. New Zealand Food Safety does not regulate the harvest or preparation of non-commercial wild foods for personal use.

This booklet provides information to minimise food safety risks associated with wild game and game birds and help hunters make safe decisions about the wild food they catch, store and eat.

More information on seafood is provided in our booklet **Food Safety for Seafood Gatherers.**

The risks

There are two main food safety risks hunters face from wild game and game birds.

The first risk is bacterial contamination, which is usually the result of:

- external wounds or sores on the animal;
- cross contamination during field dressing, especially if the gut is punctured;
- incorrect handling after dressing.

The second risk is chemical contamination. This may be caused by:

- the animal eating poison baits used to control possums and other vermin;
- wild pigs scavenging on poisoned carcasses of animals that have eaten poison baits;
- exposing the carcass to chemicals or poisons, e.g. transporting the carcass home in a vehicle that is also used to carry weed-killer or fuel.

What is non-commercial wild game?

Wild game covers any wild animal or bird you can hunt. This includes pig, deer, goat, tahr, chamois, duck, pheasant, quail, Canadian geese and rabbits.

Non-commercial wild game includes animals or birds that are hunted for personal consumption. It is illegal to sell wild game or game birds unless you are a certified hunter supplying wild game to a premises that has an MPI registered risk management programme. More information on commercial hunting can be found at **mpi.govt.nz/homekill-hunting-game-and-wild-meat-requirements**.

Wild game and game birds caught for personal consumption are not subject to the same kinds of regulatory measures as venison bought from the supermarket. The quality and safety of wild game is directly related to the health of the animal and how well it is looked after in the field.

Some hunters prefer to have someone else butcher their game for them. Recreational-catch service providers are listed butchers who cut up and process wild game (e.g. deer and pig) for recreational hunters. A list of recreational-catch service providers can be found at **mpi.govt.nz/registers-lists/hunters**

Sharing meat with family and friends

You can share your wild game meat with family, friends or visitors as long as you don't exchange it for money or other goods or services. A restaurant can cook your meat, but again only for you and your immediate party.

However, because no assurances can be given about whether the meat is fit to eat, you cannot raffle, trade or sell wild game or game birds. For example, you can't:

- give meat to your local school to raffle;
- sell the meat at a farmers' market.

You can raffle, trade or sell those parts of your catch that are not for human or animal consumption, for example, hides, skins, horns and antlers.

Hunting wild game animals

The information in this section applies largely to wild game animals, in particular deer and pigs. Specific information about game birds is covered later in the booklet.

Planning the hunt

When you are hunting game animals it pays to plan ahead. Along with organising any hunting permit, making sure you have a valid gun licence and enough ammunition for the trip, and telling someone where you are going and for how long, there are a few key things it's recommended you check before you leave.

Identifying safe hunting areas

When planning a hunt you should find out if poisons have been laid in the area where you will be hunting.

If you will be hunting on private land, contact the landowner or manager to find out which poisons have been (or are being) used, and how long ago bait was laid.

If you're hunting on public land, go to the Department of Conservation website to see maps of where posions have been laid. If hunting on Māori land contact the Trust responsible for the administration of the land.

More information about poisons is covered on pages 12-13.

Commercial pig hunting in the Marlborough Sounds is prohibited as pigs in this area may contain poison residues. It is recommended that recreational hunters also avoid taking wild pigs from this area. This area is known as a restricted procurement area (RPA). For more information see the section on RPAs on pages 14-15.

Equipment

- A good knife is essential. Make sure your knife is clean and sharp before carefully packing it away with your hunting gear.
- Specialised gutting knives are good for inexperienced hunters as they reduce the risk of puncturing the gut.
- Take a clean carcass bag or cheese cloth to protect the meat from flies, dirt, grass and other potential contaminants that you don't want to end up eating.
- Alcohol-based hand cleaner is useful for sanitising your hands when soap and water aren't available.
- A piece of string can be useful for tying the anus of an animal to prevent leakage when gutting it.

On the hunt

The best place to shoot an animal is in the head or forequarter. This makes for a quick kill and reduces the risk of puncturing the gut and contaminating the meat with gut content.

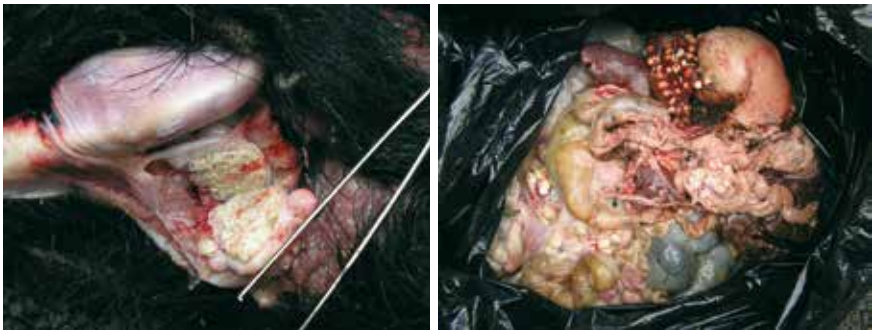
The healthy animal, inside and out

When deciding if an animal is fit to eat, consider the following:

- If possible, before you take a shot watch the animal and see if it is showing any signs of sickness. Is it moving around easily? Does it appear maimed or injured in any way?
- Does the animal look unusually skinny or underweight (especially if there is plenty of food around)?
- Does the animal have any wounds or signs of infection? Are they localised in one area, or in several places on the body?
- Does the animal's coat look normal?
- Animals like deer, chamois, or tahr usually have shiny coats (except during the moult). Pigs have much coarser hair, and their coat is unlikely to be a good indicator of health.
- When the animal is first cut open, are there any signs of infection or disease? Does it smell unusually bad? Do any organs look inflamed, swollen or diseased?

If a wound or infection is localised to one area, this part of the animal can be trimmed off the carcass and discarded.

If the animal looks to be in poor condition overall (e.g. has several open and infected wounds, is underweight, and when you cut it open the gut looks infected and/or shows signs of disease) you may decide not to continue.



Credit: OSPRI New Zealand

Pig infected with Tuberculosis (Tb)

Keeping it clean

Once you are ready to field dress the animal there are a few things to remember to get the best out of your wild game.

Wherever possible ensure your knife and hands are clean before bleeding and gutting your catch. The best option is to clean hands and knives with soap and water, but if water isn't available, alcohol-based hand sanitiser or anti-bacterial wet wipes (available from your supermarket) are a good alternative. Remember to pack out what you pack in.

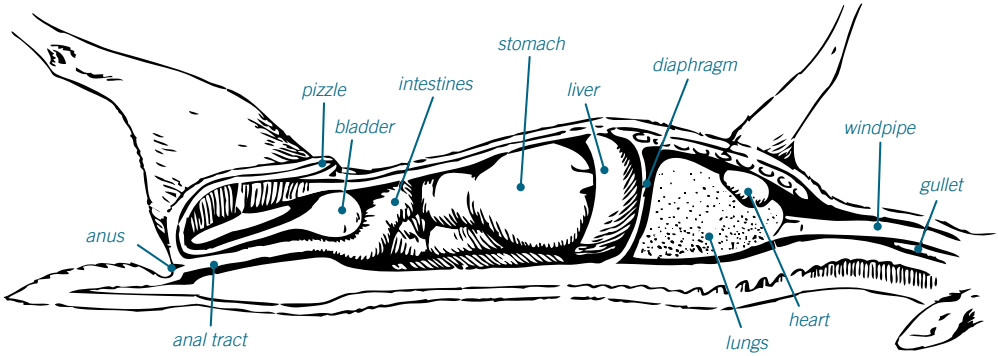
Wash your knife and hands regularly while gutting an animal to avoid contaminating the carcass with dirt, insects, grass or other contaminants.

Field dressing

Although it is not a food safety issue, animals should be bled as soon as possible after killing. Not bleeding the animal will affect the quality and taste of the meat.

As soon as you have bled the animal, you need to remove the organs and gut from the carcass. Removing the organs helps the carcass cool quickly and reduces the risk of bacteria multiplying and contaminating the meat.

- Begin by removing the pizzle and testes (if male). Then cut around the anus to free the anal tract, being careful not to rupture the bladder. A string can be tied around the anus to stop faeces leaking out.
- Next run the knife down the belly of the animal, using your fingers as a guide by placing them under the blunt side of the blade. This will help reduce the risk of puncturing the gut.
- Once you open the gut cavity you can then pull the anal tract out and away from the carcass.
- Before removing the gut and internal organs free the diaphragm from the rib cage. Reach forward as far as possible into the chest cavity and cut through the oesophagus/gullet and windpipe.



These steps help reduce the risk of contaminating the carcass with faecal matter or gut contents. Take extra care when removing the gut from the carcass.

The heart is usually safe to eat. Never eat the liver or kidneys and don't feed them to your pets. These organs filter poisons from the body and can concentrate them. These poisons may make you very sick or could kill your dog if you use them for dog food.

Check the organs and visible meat carefully for signs of disease. Make sure they are free of any abscesses, cysts and/or pus. If the organs look abnormally big, or infected in any way the animal may not be safe to eat.

Discard all offal waste well away from waterways, tracks, campsites and huts.

Do not wash the carcass while in the bush. Water can spread contamination throughout the carcass and the high moisture levels promote the growth of bacteria. If there is localised contamination on the carcass (e.g. if an area has been soiled during gutting), trim the soiled area.

Where possible leave the skin on the carcass. The skin acts as a natural barrier against flies and other insects, and dirt.

Do not use fly spray on or around the carcass (skinned or not) to deter flies. This could lead to residues on the meat. Instead cover the carcass with clean muslin cloth, or use a game bag, and hang it up high in a cool, dry place.

Tips on storing meat when on a hunt

- Where possible, leave the skin on – it's a great natural barrier against contamination.
- If you have skinned the animal, let the exposed meat surfaces of the carcass dry out. Dry meat surfaces reduce the chances of bacteria growing.
- Keep the meat as cool as possible. Hang the meat well out of the sun, up high in a cool, dry place.

Quick tips

- Wash knives, chopping boards and other utensils thoroughly after butchering or cutting up meat.
- Store raw meat in the lower part of the fridge below cooked food.
- Always marinate meat in the fridge, not on the bench.
- Cool leftover cooked food quickly, and put it in the refrigerator as soon as possible.
- You can share your wild game meat with family, friends or visitors as long as it is not exchanged for money or other goods or services.

Taking cuts of meat

If you decide to butcher the animal in the bush and only take out a few select cuts, use the skin (hair side down) as a mat. This keeps meat off the ground and helps prevent it picking up dirt as you make the cuts.

Once you have taken your cuts, wrap the meat well in clean muslin cloth and tie it off tightly to avoid any contamination while it is inside your pack.

Transporting and storing your catch

If you are walking out of the bush with a whole carcass, leave the skin on or keep the meat covered with muslin cloth. This protects it from contamination by flies and other insects or dirt.

Clean your vehicle before you go hunting so you have a clean place to put your animal carcasses. Keep your vehicle free from any poisons, baits or other chemicals, and dirt. Avoid stacking warm carcasses on top of each other as this will cause them to deteriorate quickly.

Do not transport a carcass on the bull bars or bonnet of the vehicle as the heat from the engine may promote the growth of bacteria and cause meat to deteriorate quickly.

Chill the meat as soon as possible to minimise the growth of bacteria. When transporting cuts of meat place the meat in a chilly bin in your vehicle. Make sure the meat is packed in sealed bags and use ice packs to keep it cool.

Refrigerate meat as soon as possible.

Carcasses are often aged before being cut up. Once home, hang them in a cool place, preferably under refrigeration. Wrap the carcass in muslin cloth or a carcass bag to keep it clean and free from contamination.

When freezing meat, package cuts in small amounts and spread them throughout your freezer to help the meat freeze quickly.

If you are storing raw meat in the fridge place it in the lower part of the fridge below cooked food to avoid any juices dripping on to cooked food.

Preparing wild game

Hunters should take responsibility for ensuring that wild game is safe to eat, for themselves and others they share their catch with.

Always wash and dry your hands thoroughly, using soap and water and a clean towel, before and after handling raw meat.

If you are away hunting over several days and you shoot an animal early in the hunt, it is best to eat it immediately. It may not last until you can get it home, unless the weather is very cold.

If you do eat your catch while still on a hunt, prepare meals "fresh" each day. Bacteria that can make you sick will multiply happily in unrefrigerated leftovers!

Always use clean utensils (e.g. knives) and chopping boards when preparing food.

At home, if you decide to reheat a meal from the previous day make sure the food is cooked thoroughly and steaming hot right through to the middle. Do not reheat food more than once.

In all cases, the safest option is to cook wild game thoroughly. However, if you choose to eat wild venison steaks or roasts rare, make sure you cook the outside surfaces over a very hot heat to kill any bacteria on the surface.

Eat cooked food while it is still hot. Don't leave it to stand at room temperature.

Feeding wild game to pets

There is the possibility that wild game used for pet food could contain unacceptable levels of poison residues. Dogs in particular are very susceptible to 1080 poisoning. Pets/working animals should not be fed meat from wild animals that have had any chance of being exposed to this or any other poison.

Wild pork and *Trichinella*

Wild pork may be infected with the Trichinella parasite. Trichinellosis, also called trichinosis, is the disease caused by eating raw or undercooked wild pork infected with the Trichinella spiralis worm.

Trichinella worms can be killed by thoroughly cooking your pork to 75°C or higher, right through. When cooked, the meat should not be pink and the juices should run clear. Cooking the meat at these temperatures kills the worms in the meat. Any offcuts or meat fed to animals, e.g. dogs, should also be cooked to these temperatures. You can also kill Trichinella by freezing meat to -18°C, or below, for at least 20 days.

Smoking or microwaving pork products will not kill the worms.

Trichinellosis is a notifiable disease to both the public and animal health authorities in New Zealand. Infection of humans and domestic pigs is very rare.

Poisons and toxic residues

Vertebrate toxic agents, or poisons, such as brodifacoum, cyanide and 1080, are mainly used to kill possums and rodents. These may be laid free or in bait stations as cereal baits, pellets or mixed in a paste. Poisons and residues have buffer zone requirements and caution periods applied to indicate when and where it is safe to hunt.

How can wild animals come into contact with poisons?

Wild game animals can easily access and eat poisons if they have not been laid in bait stations. Wild pigs often scavenge on dead possums or rodents that have been poisoned.

Wild animals caught or shot in areas where baits have been laid may contain residues. No assurances can be given for the safety or fitness of the meat for consumption.

Anticoagulants

Brodifacoum, bromadiolone and flocoumafen are commonly used anticoagulants. They work by slowing or even stopping blood clotting, causing the animal to bleed to death (often internally). Not all animals die, some just accumulate the poisons in their liver and have blood clotting problems. If they eat enough poison, they will eventually die. Some examples of these products include Talon, Pestoff, Bromatrol and Storm.

Anyone can buy most anticoagulant poisons, such as Talon or Pestoff Possum. Products containing brodifacoum for possum control require the user to display signs where it is used in public areas.

While there are no known cases of ill health directly linked to eating wild game meat contaminated with brodifacoum, residues of this poison have been found in the livers of wild pigs. This may pose a serious potential food safety risk if eaten. Brodifacoum doesn't break down when the meat is cooked and could still be present when eaten.

If wild game eat a small amount of the poison bait, or pigs eat dead animals which have been poisoned, the amount of poison consumed may not be enough to kill them. The poison then stays in the animal's system for a very long time, and will be in the meat and concentrated in the liver and kidneys.

An animal which has very recently eaten a high, but non-lethal, dose of anticoagulant poison may have poison residues concentrated in the meat. Regularly eating meat over several months from such an animal poses the risk of continued and cumulative exposure to the poison. If this meat is eaten by a person on the drug warfarin (or any other blood thinning medication), the residues can exaggerate the effects of the medication.

1080

The pesticide 1080 is largely used for possum control. It is biodegradable and therefore breaks down in the soil or waterways. Although technically it could be harmful to humans, someone would have to eat a large amount of bait before falling ill. However, 1080 is highly toxic to dogs so don't allow your dog to scavenge, or eat any pellets or bait.

1080 may be laid as cereal baits, or carrots with 1080 added. It can also be mixed in a paste and put in pots nailed to trees, or on the ground, or made into pellets with flour and placed in bait stations.

In 2007, the Environmental Risk Management Authority New Zealand (now the Environmental Protection Authority – EPA) reassessed 1080 based on the most recent information available. The EPA's reassessment of 1080 can be found on their website: www.epa.govt.nz.

Buffer zones

Buffer zones are the distance from where poison has been laid to where it is safe to hunt the animals. Wild animals will roam and when hunting wild game the following buffer zones are recommended as absolute minimums.

Avoid taking:

- wild pigs from within 5km of an area where poison has been laid or dropped;
- deer or goats from within 2km of an area where poison has been laid or dropped;
- possums and rabbits from within 1km of an area where poison has been laid or dropped;
- any other species from within 2km of an area where poison has been laid or dropped.

If the area where poison has been dropped is fenced, or there are natural barriers which will prevent an animal moving into the area, buffer zones may not apply. However, there is no guarantee that an animal won't move beyond the fence or barrier and game should not be taken unless you are absolutely certain there is no risk. If in any doubt, do not hunt in the area.

Caution periods

The caution period refers to the time when the poison is laid to when the land is safe for hunting again. You should always wait for the recommended time to pass before hunting on land where poison has been used (refer to table below).

Poison Groups, Caution Periods and Buffer Zones for Wild or Game Estate Animals

Poison group		1	2	3	4
Poison		• Zinc phosphide • Para-aminopropiophenone • Sodium nitrite • Any other poison not covered in groups 2 to 4 (except sodium cyanide, potassium cyanide and cholecalciferol)	• Diphacinone • Pindone	• Coumatetralyl • 1080	• Brodifacoum • Difethialone • Bromadiolone • Flocoumafen • Difenacoum
Caution period (All species)		**1 month**	**2 months**	**4 months**	**3 years**
Buffer zone	**Rabbits[1]**	0 m	200 m	200 m	200 m
	Hares, thar, wallabies and possums	0 m	1 km	1 km	1 km
	Goats, chamois, deer and buffalo	0 m	2 km	2 km	2 km
	Pigs and other species	0 m	2 km	2 km	5 km

1 Game estate mammals does not include rabbits

Check with the Department of Conservation, the regional council, the land owner or manager, or the trust responsible for the land to find out which poison was used in the area, when it was used, and how long you need to wait before it is safe to hunt again. The Department of Conservation provides up-to-date information on its website about where pesticides have been used: www.doc.govt.nz.

Restricted hunting areas

New Zealand Food Safety identifies hunting areas where the chance of wild game contamination from poison residues is high enough to warrant the area being classified as a restricted procurement area (RPA). The Marlborough Sounds is the first RPA in New Zealand.

Information gathered by New Zealand Food Safety indicates that wild pigs from the Marlborough Sounds may contain poisons. This is a result of the use of poisons such as brodifacoum (a rat poison) by individuals for pest control in the area.

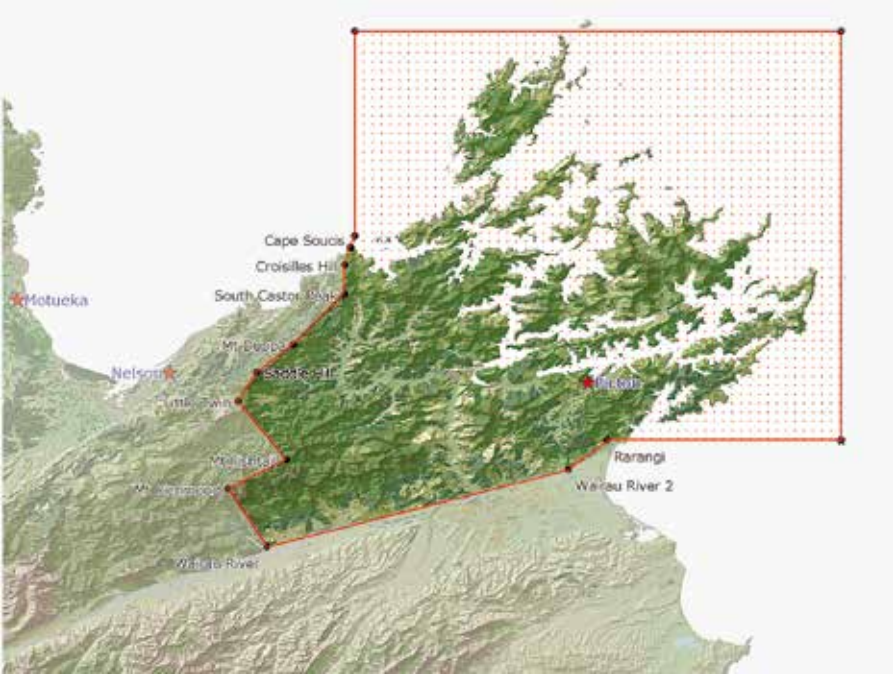
Wild pigs become contaminated from scavenging on dead rats and possums that have fed on the poisons, or from directly consuming the poison themselves.

Even though deer are similarly affected by poisons, there is no evidence to suggest any risk from residues present in deer in this area. The most likely reason is that unlike wild pigs, deer do not scavenge.

Any commercially hunted wild game taken from this area to be supplied for trade must go through tests for residues. However, no similar requirement can be made for wild game that may be eaten by a hunter, their family and friends. New Zealand Food Safety strongly recommends that wild pigs caught in the Marlborough Sounds by recreational hunters are tested before being eaten or avoided altogether.

Location of the Marlborough Sounds restricted procurement area

The Marlborough Sounds restricted procurement area is within the Marlborough Province of the South Island. It is approximately the area of land and sea north and east of the Bryant and Richmond Ranges, north of the Wairau River and the coast line between Cape Soucis and Rarangi (settlement). It includes all the islands of the Marlborough Sounds (see map).



From June 2008 the restriction has only applied to pigs in the Marlborough Sounds area. For more information on RPAs visit New Zealand Food Safety's website: **mpi.govt.nz/food-safety-hunters**.

Hunting game birds

The food safety information in this section applies to game birds, such as ducks, swans, geese and turkeys.

All game bird hunters hunting waterfowl on wetland areas (public and private) must use non-toxic shot. Game bird hunters must also hold a licence and be aware of hunting seasons and bag limits. For more information contact Fish & Game New Zealand: **www.fishandgame.org.nz**.

The risks

The main food safety risk hunters face from game birds is bacterial contamination. This is usually the result of bacteria in or on the bird and/or poor handling. As with wild game animals, you risk contaminating your catch if you transport your birds in a vehicle that is used to carry pesticides or chemicals. Make sure your vehicle is clean before you leave for the hunt.

Evidence has shown that poison residues in game birds are likely to be insignificant.

Planning

Most game birds are cleaned and dressed after the hunt, but there are important preparations to make before you leave for the hunt:

- Pack a chilly bin and ice packs to keep the meat cool, if breasting birds in the field.
- Take a length of string or wire to hang your birds off the ground and in the shade.
- Take a clean, sharp knife for gutting and breasting your birds.
- Take clean tap or drinking water if you intend to dress the birds in the field.
- Alcohol-based hand cleaner or wet wipes are useful for cleaning hands when soap and water are not available. They can also be used to clean your knife and other equipment.

Type of ammunition

No person may possess or use lead shot, while hunting or killing waterfowl within 200 metres of open water, with any gun using a 10 or 12 gauge cartridge. Non-toxic alternative shot may be used, including steel.

Waterfowl means:

- Black swan;
- Grey duck;
- Mallard duck;
- Paradise shelduck or Paradise duck;
- Australasian shoveler duck (New Zealand shoveler);
- any cross species, variety, or kind of duck;
- Pukeko.

Open water means either:

- any area of land or seabed covered permanently or seasonally by water wider than 3 metres; or
- any area which is temporarily covered by water wider than 3 metres at the time of hunting.

Field dressing

Always hang your birds on the cool side of the maimai in the shade, or place them out of the sun. As the sun rises, keep an eye on the birds and move your catch if the sun begins to fall on them.

Always gut the bird as soon as possible even if you don't pluck it until later. Make sure all your equipment is clean before you start.

When gutting the bird try not to puncture the gut as this will contaminate the meat. Remove the gizzard, heart, lungs and entrails. Using a bit of stiff hose, or similar, run it up and down the backbone to remove the material attached to either side. Clean your knife and hands between each bird to prevent cross-contamination.

If you breast your birds during the quiet periods of a hunt, clean the breasts well and place them in plastic bags in a chilly bin with ice packs to keep them cool.

If you find that the breast is bloodied or damaged by shot, try washing, scraping or trimming the damaged area. If none of the above work, throw it out. Use clean water to wash each breast and dry well with clean paper towels. Chill quickly, and refrigerate or freeze the meat as soon as you get home.

Plucking and cleaning

While plucking, if you come to a bird that has a portion that has gone "green", discard the whole bird.

The feathers can be home to lots of bacteria, so thoroughly rinse all meat and carcasses with plenty of clean water, and pat dry with paper towels. Check the carcass very carefully for shot. Steel and lead shot will break teeth, and lead shot is harmful if eaten. Once you have finished plucking, place the bird on its bottom in a clean chilly bin to allow it to drain.

Hanging and storage

If you are going to age your catch, birds are best aged in the fridge. Hanging your birds increases the risk of contamination and if not refrigerated, bacteria on the birds will multiply rapidly. Chill or freeze your birds as soon as possible.

No matter how well you wash and clean your bird you cannot remove all bacteria. It's important to make sure your bird does not drip on other food and contaminate it. Always store in a sealed container in your fridge, on the bottom rack below other food.

After handling birds, thoroughly clean hands and all kitchen surfaces.

Cooking

Game birds need to be well cooked – ideally long and slow in a crockpot or casserole, or use an oven bag to prevent the meat from drying out. It's hard to process birds hygienically so you need to cook them well to make sure any harmful bacteria are killed.

How to avoid foodborne illness

Foodborne illness is the term used when you get sick from contaminated food. Bacteria, fungi, parasites, viruses and toxins may contaminate food and cause stomach upsets, nausea,vomiting and diarrhoea or worse.

Prepare, cook and store food carefully to avoid getting sick. If you think you have an illness caused by food, contact your doctor right away.

One of the best ways to reduce the risks of contaminated food is by following the 3Cs – Clean, Cook, Chill. While following the 3Cs isn't always easy when you're on a hunting trip, we recommend you follow them as best you can.

Clean

Clean hands are hands that are washed with soap and dried with a clean towel. It's important to always wash your hands before handling food, after going to the toilet, handling raw meat, handling pets or other animals, and smoking.

Wash knives and other utensils, and scrub chopping boards between preparation of raw and cooked foods.

If you use your home kitchen for butchering wild game or game birds, thoroughly clean all surfaces and utensils afterwards.

Keep raw meat and poultry covered and away from ready-to-eat food, fruit and vegetables.

Cook

Cook minced meat, sausages and wild pork thoroughly (meat should not be pink) and cook poultry until juices run clear. Reheat leftovers until steaming hot throughout and do not reheat more than once. Do not put cooked meat back on the same plate that held raw meat.

Chill

Most bacteria that cause foodborne illness thrive at room temperature – keep food either very cold or very hot. Thaw meat on the bottom shelf of the fridge so that the juices don't drip on other food.

Where to find more information

New Zealand Food Safety

For more information on food safety, hunting wild animals, poisons and toxic residues:
www.foodsafety.govt.nz

Fish & Game New Zealand

For information about game bird hunting, seasons and licensing:
www.fishandgame.org.nz

New Zealand Deerstalkers' Association

For information on recreational hunting, clubs and advocacy:
www.deerstalkers.org.nz

Department of Conservation

For more information on hunting in New Zealand's national parks, including hunting permits and pesticide summaries: **www.doc.govt.nz**

Environmental Protection Authority

For up-to-date information on poison assessments:
www.epa.govt.nz

New Zealand Police

Information on obtaining a firearm licence and safe firearm use when hunting:
www.police.govt.nz/faq/questions-by-category/firearms-weapons

Local Government New Zealand

For contact details for your local and regional councils: **www.lgnz.co.nz**

www.foodsafety.govt.nz

New Zealand Food Safety
PO Box 2526
Wellington 6140
NEW ZEALAND

0800 00 83 33

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