

# New Zealand Food Safety

Haumaru Kai Aotearoa

## Food safety at home



This booklet provides tips on what you can do to avoid foodborne illness.

**Ministry for Primary Industries**  
Manatū Ahu Matua





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# Stay well – keep food safe

Every year, thousands of New Zealanders get food poisoning. Many of these cases are due to poor food handling, preparation, cooking or storage in the home.

Food can carry harmful bacteria and viruses that can make you sick. This is known as foodborne illness (or food poisoning). The most common of these bacteria and viruses are *Campylobacter*, *Norovirus*, *Salmonella*, *Yersinia* and some *E. coli*.

Less commonly, you can also get sick from eating food when it carries fungi, parasites, toxins and natural contaminants.

Common symptoms of food poisoning include:



**nausea or vomiting**



**diarrhoea**



**stomach cramps or pains**



**chills or fever**



**muscle or joint aches**



**headaches**



**allergic reactions**

If you or your family have any of these symptoms, contact your healthcare provider.

Handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent germs spreading, and cooking is a great way to kill germs, but there's plenty more you can do to help keep your family and friends from getting sick.

This booklet contains great advice on preparing, cooking and storing food. Keep it handy so everyone who makes food in your home knows the basics of food safety.

# Handwashing



Handwashing is one of the best ways to prevent foodborne illness. Washing them before preparing or eating food helps prevent germs spreading to your food.

Also wash your hands after:

- touching raw meat and poultry;
- going to the toilet or changing nappies;
- sneezing, coughing or blowing your nose;
- tending to someone who is sick;
- handling pets or animals; and
- gardening.

To make sure they're really clean, wash them for 20 seconds on both sides using soap and clean water. Then dry them with a clean, dry towel for another 20 seconds.

Hand sanitisers are not as effective as soap and water for removing germs and harmful chemicals. But if hand sanitiser is all you have available, make sure it has at least 60 percent alcohol. Rub it into your hands and fingers until they are dry.

# Preparing food

- **Wash your hands** with soap and clean water, and dry them well before handling, cooking and eating food.
- **Use clean eggs.** Wipe them with a paper towel to make sure they are free from dirt, faecal matter and cracks. Wash your hands on both sides using clean, soapy water for at least 20 seconds. After handling eggs, also thoroughly wash preparation surfaces, dishes and utensils with hot soapy water, then rinse and dry them.
- Whether you've grown them yourself or bought them at the store, **wash and dry fresh fruit and vegetables and remove any damaged areas** before eating – especially if you are having them raw.
- **Defrost frozen foods thoroughly** so they will cook properly in the middle. If the packaging says you can cook the food directly from frozen, make sure you follow the cooking instructions. Defrost food in your fridge or use the defrost setting on your microwave. Ensure juices from defrosting meat and packaging can't spread to other food, utensils or surfaces.
- **Raw meat and its juices can carry germs** that make you sick. These can transfer to your hands, chopping boards, cooking utensils, bowls, plates and other food you're preparing. This is called "cross-contamination".
- **Don't wash raw meat**, especially chicken, before cooking. Washing it doesn't remove germs, instead it spreads them to your sink and kitchen surfaces, where they can contaminate other food. If you want, pat the meat dry with a paper towel, throw the paper towel straight into a waste bin, and wash your hands before handling other food.
- To prevent cross-contamination, **use different chopping boards for raw meat, seafood and ready-to-eat foods** like salads and cheese. If you have only one chopping board and have used it to prepare raw meat or seafood, wash it in hot, soapy water and dry it well before using it for other food. The same applies for utensils, plates or bowls used for preparing and serving food.





## CLEANING TIPS

- **Wash your cloths regularly**  
Try to use clean cloths every day for washing and drying the dishes. Dirty cloths can spread germs onto your hands, other dishes and utensils, and throughout your kitchen.
- **Microwave your sponges**  
Cloths or sponges used to wash dishes can be sanitised by placing them wet in a microwave on high for 3 to 4 minutes. The heat will kill off bacteria and viruses. Sponges with a metal or steel mesh should not be microwaved.
- **Clean as you go**  
To minimise cross-contamination, wash your work surfaces, utensils, chopping boards, and plates and bowls with hot soapy water as you go. If you're using a surface spray, choose one that's specifically labelled for food-preparation areas, and follow the manufacturer's instructions on contact time, rinsing and drying.

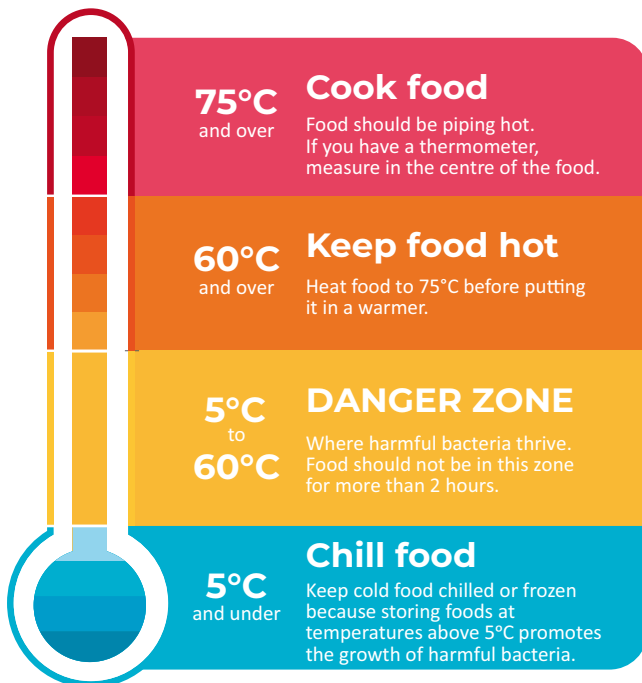
# Cooking food

You and your family can get food poisoning from undercooking certain foods – particularly chicken, other meats and seafood. This is because harmful germs can be on these foods.

Food packaging usually contains useful cooking instructions. Cooking your food at the right temperature and, importantly, for the right amount of time, helps to kill harmful germs.

## Keep hot food hot and cold food cold

Keeping food at the right temperature stops harmful bacteria growing so food will stay safer longer



## Raw meat and meat products

Raw meat and products containing uncooked meat – like burgers, sausages, saveloys, cheerios, chicken nuggets, chicken kiefs and dumplings – can carry germs that make you sick. Here are some tips on how you can reduce the risk of food poisoning when cooking meat or meat products.

- Ensure **poultry** is cooked right through to kill harmful germs. Chicken juices should run clear, and the meat should not be pink in the middle, although it can remain a little pink in colour close to the bone.
- **Pork** should also be cooked right through.
- Usually, only the surface of whole pieces of **beef, lamb or venison** will be contaminated by germs. So, whole roasts, steaks or chops just need surface cooking, such as searing or flame grilling, to make them safe to eat.
- **Blade-tenderised steaks** are often pre-marinated and you are likely to see the cut patterns on the surface when you buy them. This type of steak needs to be cooked right through. This is because surface germs could have been transferred into the centre of the meat in the tenderising process.
- When meat is minced, surface germs get mixed right through the product. So, thorough cooking is needed for **minced meat products** such as beef, pork, chicken and lamb burgers; sausages, including saveloys and cheerios; dumplings; and chicken nuggets. Cook meat all the way through, until juices run clear.
- **Convenience foods that contain minced meat** might look cooked, but the meat in the centre could still be undercooked. In particular, take extra care with frozen products like chicken nuggets, chicken kiefs or dumplings.
- If you have a **meat thermometer**, use it to check temperatures in the middle of the thickest part of the meat you're cooking. The meat should be cooked to a temperature of 75°C for 30 seconds, 70°C for 3 minutes or 65°C for 15 minutes. If you don't have a thermometer, cook meat until any juices run clear and it is piping hot.
- To **prevent cross-contamination**, use one set of utensils, plates or bowls for raw meat and chicken, and another set for cooked food. If you have only one set, wash them in hot, soapy water and dry well before using for cooked or other food.
- Heat any leftover **marinade** to boiling before pouring it over cooked foods.





## BBQing and eating outdoors

BBQing and serving food outside in the warm summer months gives germs the ideal opportunity to multiply and cause food poisoning, so outdoor cooks should take extra care to follow the usual preparation (page 3), cooking (page 6) and storage (page 8) food safety advice.

- **Keep your food covered and chilled** until you cook it.
- **Marinate meat in a covered container in the fridge or chilly bin.** Heat any leftover marinade to boiling before pouring it over cooked foods.
- **Keep raw and cooked meat separate on the grill.** This is especially important for chicken meat.
- **Turn food often** so it cooks evenly.
- Whole meats, such as **steaks or chops, just need surface cooking.**
- **Chicken, tenderised meat and minced meat products need to be BBQed until they are piping hot** (over 75°C) all the way through and their juices run clear. Don't assume that meat charred on the outside is cooked thoroughly on the inside.
- If you have one, **use a meat thermometer it to check the temperature** in the middle of the thickest part of the meat you're cooking. It should be cooked to a temperature of 75°C for 30 seconds, 70°C for 3 minutes or 65°C for 15 minutes.
- If you're expecting lots of guests, **consider pre-cooking** the food in a conventional oven or microwave and then finishing it off on the BBQ.
- It's okay to leave cooked meat for a short time on a corner of the BBQ or covered on a plate for late arrivals – just ensure it's protected from flies.
- **Keep your salads cool** until you're ready to serve them.
- **Cover and refrigerate leftovers** – or put them back in the chilly bin with ice packs – **within 2 hours.** If that's not possible, throw them away.

# Storing food at home

What to keep in your fridge – and where

Most harmful germs can't grow at low temperatures. Set your fridge temperature between 2°C and 5°C and follow these tips.

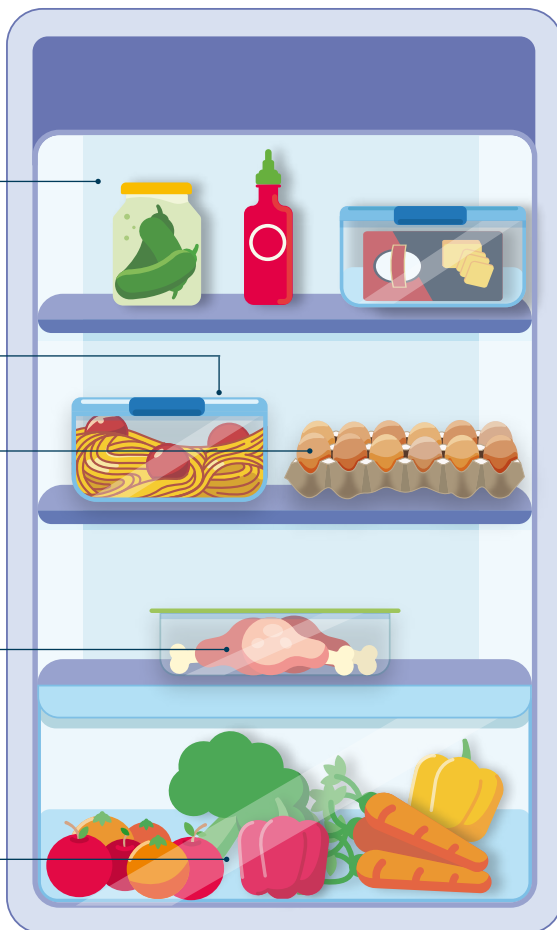
Keep ready-to-eat foods, like dairy and deli meats, that don't require cooking at the top.

Keep cooked food or leftovers on a higher shelf than raw meat or chicken. They should also be covered or in sealed containers.

Keep eggs in the fridge unless you're using them right away.

Keep raw meat and seafood on the bottom shelf in leakproof packaging or containers, separate from cooked food or food that doesn't get cooked (like fruit, vegetables and salad). This will stop raw meat and chicken juices dripping onto ready-to-eat food.

Fruit and veges should be kept in the vege drawer. Wash before using.





### FRIDGE TIPS

- **Check that your fridge door seals properly.** If it doesn't, cold air can escape and affect the temperature of food inside.
- **Keep your fridge clean.** Wipe up spills immediately. Wash surfaces with hot, soapy water and dry thoroughly with a clean cloth. Even though most germs don't like the cold, some will still grow over time.
- **Don't overfill your fridge** as this can stop cold air from circulating properly and keeping your food nice and cold.
- Whether it's in the fridge or in the cupboard, it's best to **store your food covered**. Keep it in containers with tight-sealing lids if you can.

Items like milk, mayonnaise and sauces can be safely stored in the fridge door.

## Storing and using leftovers

- **Refrigerate or freeze leftovers as soon as possible or within 2 hours** of cooking. The hotter the weather, the shorter the time food will stay safe.
- Divide large portions of hot food into smaller containers or a shallow tray to help it cool quickly and evenly, and to stop harmful bacteria from growing to levels that could cause illness.
- Store leftovers in a covered container in your fridge.

### How long you can keep leftovers

- **Rice-based leftovers:** Keep rice-based leftovers refrigerated and eat them within 2 days. These types of leftovers are risky because uncooked rice can contain bacterial spores that survive cooking. The spores then form bacteria, which produce toxins that cause food poisoning – and toxins are not destroyed by reheating.
- **Cooked food eaten cold:** Leftovers of cooked meals that are normally eaten without reheating – like pasta salads, roast vege salads or potato salads – should be refrigerated and eaten within 2 days.
- **Leftovers eaten hot:** Keep them refrigerated and eat them within 4 days. Reheat until piping hot before eating.
- **Leftover green salads:** Eat salads containing raw leafy greens as soon as you can after preparation. Use any leftover salad as ingredients in cooked dishes – like soups and stews – or throw it out. Leafy greens can carry illness-causing bacteria that survive or grow in the fridge.
- **When in doubt, throw it out.**

### Reheating

- **Reheat leftovers until piping hot** (over 75°C). Warm doesn't kill bacteria. Hot does.
- **Defrost frozen leftovers in the fridge or microwave.** Leaving meals on a bench top to defrost allows harmful bacteria to grow.
- **Don't reheat leftovers more than once.**



## Transporting food

- When getting your groceries, **pack raw meat and poultry in separate bags** to other foods. This prevents the meat juices from dripping onto other raw and ready-to-eat foods, and onto food packages.
- **Wash or replace reusable grocery bags frequently** – or right away if you think meat juices have spilled on them.
- **Take food straight home** after shopping – especially raw meat, seafood, and chilled and frozen foods.
- **Don't leave groceries in a hot car**, car boot or in direct sunlight from windows.
- If you can't take them straight home or if the weather is hot, **pack groceries in a chilly bag or bin with an ice pack**. Transfer them to the fridge or freezer as soon as you get home.



## Keeping at-risk people safe

### People with low immunity

People who are young, elderly, pregnant or immunocompromised are at higher risk of getting sick, sometimes severely, from foodborne illness.

You can minimise your chance of getting a foodborne illness by:

- knowing which foods are high risk and avoiding them;
- selecting safer foods; and
- following food safety guidelines when preparing and storing food.

Here are some foods that may pose a risk:

#### **Dairy products**

Most dairy products in New Zealand are pasteurised. Pasteurisation is a heat treatment that kills harmful germs from raw products. But pasteurised products can still become contaminated once opened.

Dairy foods that should be avoided when you have low immunity include:

- raw or unpasteurised products;

- soft cheeses – unless they are cooked. If you know they have been properly refrigerated, soft cheeses can be eaten immediately after opening for the first time. Soft cheeses that have been opened and stored could be contaminated, because harmful germs, in particular *Listeria*, can grow at fridge temperatures;
- commercially prepared and unpackaged smoothies or shakes; and
- soft-serve ice cream.

### **Vegetables, salads and fruit**

Wash and dry fresh fruit and vegetables before you eat them, especially if you are eating them raw. Some herbs are difficult to clean and – along with bean sprouts or sprouted seeds – should be avoided unless they are going to be cooked.

### **Meat, poultry, seafood and eggs**

If you have low immunity, you should not eat:

- raw or undercooked meat, including poultry, fish or shellfish;
- raw or undercooked eggs;
- foods containing raw eggs (such as homemade mayonnaise, hollandaise sauce, Caesar dressing and some desserts); and
- cold meats, pâté or cold-smoked fish.

Meat, poultry, seafood and eggs should only be eaten if cooked until piping hot (over 75°C).

## **People with food allergies**

### **Eating certain foods could have severe or even life-threatening consequences for people with allergies.**

When cooking for someone with an allergy, take special care as even minimal traces can cause severe reactions in some people.

- Keep food allergens separate from other food.
- Read allergen information on food labels. Avoid foods that have no information in English.
- Clean surfaces and equipment - such as chopping boards and utensils – to remove allergen residues. Wash them well with hot, soapy water or in a dishwasher. Peanut butter residues and wheat flour, for example, can stick to chopping boards, plates and surfaces such as bench tops.
- Do not re-use frying oils in case of contamination with fish or peanuts, for example.





## Keeping kids' lunch boxes safe

Keeping your family's food safe extends to the kids' school lunch boxes, especially during summer when lunch boxes might be sitting in the heat.

When lunch boxes get hot, the food inside can become unsafe to eat. To keep lunch boxes safe:

- have clean hands and utensils when making packed lunches;
- if you are making the packed lunches the night before, keep them in the fridge;
- freeze drink bottles overnight for an instant ice block or use a mini freezer pack for kids;
- keep perishable foods (like cold meats or egg sandwiches) safe by packing them between cold items like yoghurt;
- put star stickers on foods that can spoil to make sure they're eaten first; and
- give lunch boxes and drink bottles a good wash after use.

Children at school can help by:

- keeping their lunch boxes out of the sun and heat;
- washing and drying their hands before eating; and
- eating chilled foods first.



# Use-by and best-before dates

Date marks indicate how long food can be kept before it becomes unsafe to eat or starts going off. Most packaged foods with a shelf life of up to 2 years require a date mark.

Here's how to tell the difference between use-by and best-before date marks.

## Use by

- A use-by label relates to food safety.
- Foods with use-by dates can become unsafe to eat before they are visibly spoiled or off.
- If it's past its use by, say “goodbye” – eating this food could make you sick.
- It's illegal to sell food past its use-by date.



## Best before

- A best-before label relates to the food's quality.
- Foods with best-before dates will go stale or spoil before they become unsafe to eat.
- If it looks and smells okay, it probably is. Check it, sniff it, taste it – don't waste it.
- Food can be sold beyond its best-before date, as long as it's still safe to eat.



# Advice for shellfish gatherers

Gathering shellfish is a much loved tradition for many New Zealanders. But, because shellfish can pick up and store harmful germs, biotoxins or contaminants from their growing waters, they are a high-risk food that can cause sickness.

Thoroughly cooking shellfish should kill harmful germs, but it won't destroy biotoxins or other contaminants.

The most effective way to ensure you don't get sick from eating shellfish is to collect from areas where the seawater is not contaminated. Look out for public health warnings at beaches and subscribe to New Zealand Food Safety biotoxin alerts on our webpage.

## Gathering and transporting

- When gathering shellfish, keep them alive and cool to keep them fresh.
- Keep them in a bucket of seawater, out of the sun, to let them de-sand.
- Store and transport shellfish in a chilly bin or bucket with ice packs.

## Storing at home

- Refrigerate shellfish as soon as possible on the bottom shelf, below cooked food.
- To freeze shellfish, remove the shells as soon as possible and freeze in their cooking water or natural juices.
- Before cooking, defrost in the fridge.

## Preparing and cooking

- Don't eat or cook shellfish that were dead at harvest or have broken shells.
- Use shellfish within 2 days of harvest.
- Thoroughly clean chopping boards and utensils with warm, soapy water after preparing raw shellfish.
- Keep raw shellfish separate from cooked or ready-to-eat products.
- Cook shellfish thoroughly, until at least 65°C for 1 minute (until they open and are firm to touch).
- Thoroughly reheat leftover seafood to a minimum core temperature of 75°C.

**If you feel sick soon after eating shellfish, seek medical help immediately – especially if you have breathing difficulties, numbness or neurological problems like memory loss or seizures.**



**Read more at**  
**[www.mpi.govt.nz/food-safety-home](http://www.mpi.govt.nz/food-safety-home)**

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This information does not replace or substitute for advice given by an appropriate professional. If you suspect you have a food allergy, you should see an appropriate health professional.

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**New Zealand Government**