



Food Writers New Zealand  
**HANDBOOK**  
*food safety*

# FOOD SAFETY IN NEW ZEALAND

Food safety is all about making sure that food is safe to eat and won't make people sick. When food is contaminated it can be harmful, causing food poisoning or infections which lead to vomiting and diarrhoea. Food can be contaminated in many ways, from bacteria (e.g. salmonella, campylobacter, listeria, clostridium, etc) and viruses (e.g. norovirus, hepatitis), to cleaning chemicals, and foreign bodies such as hair, insects or pieces of packaging. Bacteria are the most common cause of food-related illness.

Bacterial foodborne illness can occur by infection or by intoxication. Infection occurs when microorganisms such as salmonella, campylobacter and listeria are ingested, survive, grow and overcome the body's defences. Intoxication occurs when bacteria grow in the food and release toxins that are then ingested with the food. Examples are staphylococcus, *Bacillus cereus*, *Clostridium perfringens* and *Clostridium botulinum*.

To be sure that the food served is safe to eat, everyone needs to think about the types of hazards that could be a problem. In particular food preparers and consumers need to understand the type of microorganisms that may cause an illness, and how they are controlled.

Many raw ingredients can be contaminated naturally with bacteria. It is also possible to contaminate food when it is being handled and prepared. The food preparer can control these hazards by proper storage, cooking and serving of foods, and everyone needs to be aware of hazards and trained in the practices used to control them.

Some foods are considered high risk such raw meat and chicken, seafood and rice. See <http://www.foodsmart.govt.nz/food-safety/high-risk-foods> for more information on dealing with high-risk foods.

The temperature danger zone for foods is between 5°C and 60°C. Store perishable foods in the refrigerator and cook/reheat foods to greater than 70°C (piping hot).

## PREPARATION

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm water and dry with a clean dry towel or paper towel.
- Gloves aren't necessary as long as hand hygiene is adequate.
- Always wash and dry hands before and after handling food. Follow the 20:20 rule.
- Wash and dry your hands every time after you touch raw meat or chicken.
- Cover cuts and sores with a clean plaster, then use disposable gloves as an extra precaution. Wash or change the gloves as often as hands would be washed.
- Do not cough or sneeze where food is being prepared. Step away from the food and cough or sneeze into your elbow.
- Make sure that the kitchen surfaces and all equipment used are kept clean. Hot soapy water is sufficient to clean surfaces.

- Make sure that all utensils and containers used to prepare or store food are only used for that purpose.
- Use separate containers, separate chopping boards and utensils to prepare raw meat and other foods, or wash them thoroughly in hot soapy water between uses. Wipe chopping boards dry with a paper towel.
- Wash and rinse dishes and utensils in hot water and stand them to dry, or use a dishwasher.
- Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly before they are used.
- Throw out any chipped or cracked cups and plates. They can trap bacteria that later contaminates cooked foods.

#### COOKING

- Defrost frozen foods completely before cooking.
- Defrost food in the fridge or use the defrost feature of the microwave. Do not leave food to defrost at air temperature; it increases the risk of bacteria multiplying.
- Use a meat thermometer to check temperatures. If a thermometer is not available, ensure minced meat and sausages are cooked right through, and cook poultry and pork until juices run clear. If in doubt, keep cooking.
- Use a different set of utensils for raw meat and chicken and another set for cooked food. Do not cross contaminate cooked foods with raw juices.
- Reheat leftovers until steaming hot. Food may require mixing or cutting into smaller pieces to ensure the middle is steaming hot.
- Do not reheat food more than once.

#### STORAGE

Correct storage is very important; it ensures the quality and safety of the food is maintained and can also prevent costly wastage.

- Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Check expiry dates and make sure food is used or thrown out by the expiry date.
- Ensure foods are labelled and dated.
- Rotate stock to ensure older items are used first.
- Put foods that will spoil or perish quickly into the fridge or freezer straight away.
- Dry foods like cereals, rice and flour should be kept in airtight, labelled containers, off the ground.
- If in doubt, throw it out.

#### IN THE REFRIGERATOR

- Don't overfill the refrigerator – it is important air can circulate around the food.
- The refrigerator temperature should be between 2°C and 4°C. Use a fridge thermometer to check the refrigerator temperature is ~4°C in the centre of the refrigerator.
- Store vegetables in the crisper.
- Keep leftovers/cooked foods for a maximum of 3 days. If in doubt, throw it out.

- Ensure raw meat is properly wrapped or in sealed containers to stop drips. Store away from fresh and ready-to-eat foods.
- Keep all perishable foods cold until you are ready to use them.
- Cover and refrigerate food as soon as possible after cooking.
- Throw out perishable foods that you have left at room temperature for more than two hours.
- Cool food on the bench before it is put in the refrigerator or freezer – large quantities and foods such as rice should be cooled in large, shallow dishes to assist with rapid cooling.
- The freezer temperature should be no less than -12°C.

#### **RUBBISH**

The way that rubbish is stored and disposed of is very important. Bacteria and viruses can survive in rubbish. Mice and rats, cats, birds, cockroaches and other vermin may live there and decontaminate the food preparation area. Food preparers need to:

- wrap food scraps and waste
- remove rubbish from the kitchen and serving areas as soon as the bag or bin becomes full
- store rubbish in a strong container with a lid
- clean and disinfect the rubbish container often
- remove all rubbish from the kitchen each day or store it in a separate area that animals, children and dumpster-divers cannot reach.

*For more information: [www.foodsmart.govt.nz/food-safety](http://www.foodsmart.govt.nz/food-safety)*

Our first handbook was produced in 1991, with the purpose of providing a reference tool that in turn would establish standards for New Zealand food writers. In 1999 the handbook was updated to reflect the growing needs of members.

Food Writers New Zealand is indebted to our hardworking, talented, innovative and active contributors who provided their specialist input for this latest edition.

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KATHY PATERSON, PRESIDENT, 2016

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