

Ten Easy Steps to Make Food Safe

Why Worry?

It is estimated that hundreds of British Columbians get sick from food poisoning every day. The symptoms of food poisoning (stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea...) are very unpleasant, but usually go away after one to three days. However, serious cases of food poisoning can result in prolonged sickness and even death. All of these illnesses and deaths can be prevented by following ten simple safety rules.....



Cook It!

Many foods may contain harmful bacteria, viruses and parasites. Meats, poultry, fish and eggs are the worst offenders. Casseroles, pies, stews etc. made with these foods are also potentially dangerous. You should make sure these types of food are properly cooked before you eat them. Steaks, fish fillets and eggs are cooked when they reach a minimum of 63°C (145° F); pork and ground fish/meat are cooked when they reach 71° C (160° F); poultry, field dressed wild game, and stuffed meats are cooked when they reach 74° C (165° F).

Some oven thermostats are inaccurate, so you should use a meat thermometer (stuck into the deepest part of the food, but not touching a bone) to make sure the proper cooking temperature has been reached.



Cool it!

Improper cooling is one of the leading causes of food poisoning.

Don't leave food to cool on the counter for longer than 2 hours. If you're going to save cooked foods, separate large items, such as roasts or soups, into portions no more than 3 inches thick and place in the refrigerator or freezer within 2 hours.



Reheating Food

Not all harmful bacteria are killed by cooking. After cooking, these remaining bacteria can grow rapidly both when the food is cooling and when it is being re-heated. Further, the food may be re-contaminated after cooking. Therefore, food should reach at least 74°C (165°F) when you re-heat it. Again, make sure this temperature is reached by using a meat thermometer. Do not reheat your leftovers more than once!



Microwave Cooking

Microwave cooking is fast but the heat distribution is uneven. Therefore, microwaved foods need to be heated at least 14°C (25°F) higher than that recommended for conventional heating. Further, microwaved foods need to be covered, stirred or rotated at least once midway through cooking to improve heat distribution. Food reheated in microwave ovens should reach 88°C (190°F) and be allowed to stand covered for two minutes after heating.



Avoid the Danger Zone!

Harmful bacteria can grow rapidly between 4°C (40°F) and 60°C (140°F). Therefore, potentially hazardous foods (eg. meat, poultry, dairy products, eggs) must be kept hotter than 60°C (140°F) or colder than 4°C (40°F).

Don't leave food to thaw on the counter. Always defrost foods in the refrigerator, under cold running water, or in the microwave.



Protect Your Foods

Whether shopping for fresh food, preparing a meal, or storing leftovers in the refrigerator or freezer, you should make sure that ready-to-eat foods are protected from contamination. Wrap raw meats at the store so they don't drip on your other foods.

Transport and refrigerate your perishable food as quickly as possible to limit the growth time for harmful bacteria. Cover or wrap ready-to-eat foods and store them in the fridge *above* uncooked foods and remember, **ALWAYS** read the label for storage directions (i.e. keep refrigerated, keep frozen or best before dates).



Wash Your Hands

Harmful bacteria can be found everywhere! They can be picked up, for example, by petting the dog, handling the pet turtle, changing diapers or preparing raw foods, especially meats and poultry. Even healthy people can carry harmful bacteria and viruses. Proper hand washing practices are essential after using the washroom, before putting anything in your mouth, and before handling food, particularly ready-to-eat food. Hand washing includes vigorous rubbing of soaped hands for at least 20 seconds with particular attention to the areas under the fingernails and between the fingers.



Wash and Sanitize Food Contact Surfaces

Many cases of food poisoning are caused when ready-to-eat foods are accidentally contaminated by using the same utensil to prepare raw meat and ready-to-eat foods or when ready-to-eat foods are placed on a cutting board or plate that has been used for cutting or carrying raw meat. Cutting boards, plates and utensils must always be washed and sanitized immediately before ready-to-eat foods are placed on them.

And don't forget those dishcloths! Because they are warm and damp they are ideal breeding grounds for bacteria. They are often used to wipe contaminated surfaces, and then used to wipe other surfaces. This spreads harmful bacteria to areas where ready-to-eat foods are placed. Dishcloths must be well washed and sanitized between uses.

You can make a sanitizing solution by mixing 1/2 ounce (1 tablespoon) of 6% household bleach into one gallon of water, or a teaspoon of 6% bleach into a litre of water.



Always Wash Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

Fresh fruits and vegetables, such as melons and lettuce, have also caused food borne illness outbreaks. They can become contaminated by irrigation waters, soil, and unsanitary processing methods.

Always wash fresh fruits and vegetables thoroughly. Pay particular attention to fruits and vegetables that will be served raw, and fruits that do not have their peel removed before eating. Contamination on the outside of rind fruits (like watermelon, cantaloupe, and honeydew melon) can be transferred to the inside of cut fruit by the cutting knife. Refrigeration of melons after cutting is highly recommended.



Exclude Sick People

Harmful bacteria and viruses can be spread from food handlers to the food they are preparing. Some of these (e.g. Salmonella, Hepatitis A, E. coli) are then passed on to people who eat the food and get sick. Therefore, any person who has symptoms of diarrhea or vomiting, or has infected cuts or sores, should not be allowed to handle food in any way.

If in Doubt, Throw it Out!

Finally, don't take chances with your food. Remember foods that are contaminated may not look or smell bad so **if in doubt, throw it out!**

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