

Food Safety: 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 include stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. The symptoms usually go away after one to three days. However, serious cases of food poisoning can result in prolonged sickness and even death. Follow ten simple safety rules to help prevent these illnesses and deaths.

Cook It!

Many foods may contain harmful bacteria, viruses and parasites. Meats, poultry, fish and eggs are some examples. Casseroles, pies, stews and other meals made with these foods can also be dangerous. You should make sure that these types of food are properly cooked before you eat them:

- Cook steaks, fish fillets and eggs to a minimum of 63°C (145° F).
- Cook pork and ground fish or meat to 71° C (160° F).
- Cook poultry; field dressed wild game, and stuffed meats to 74° C (165° F).

Some oven thermostats are inaccurate, so you should use a meat thermometer (put into the deepest part of the food, but do not touch 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. Do not leave food to cool on the counter for longer than two hours. To save cooked foods, separate large items such as roasts or soups into portions no more than three inches thick, and place in the refrigerator or freezer within two hours.

Reheating Food

Cooking does not kill all harmful bacteria. After cooking, the remaining bacteria can grow rapidly when the food is cooling and being re-heated. Therefore, you should re-heat the food to at least 74°C (165°F).

Microwave Cooking

Although microwave cooking is fast, the heat distribution is uneven. Stir or rotate food in the microwave at least once during cooking to improve heat distribution.

Heat foods in the microwave to at least 14°C (25°F) higher than that recommended for conventional heating. Food reheated in microwave ovens should reach 88°C (190°F) and be allowed to stand covered for two minutes afterwards.

Avoid the Danger Zone!

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

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

Protect Your Foods

Transport and refrigerate your perishable food as quickly as possible. This helps prevent the growth of harmful bacteria. Cover or wrap ready-to-eat foods and store them in the fridge *above* uncooked foods. Remember, always read the label for storage instructions.

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.

It is essential to wash hands properly after you use the washroom, and before you eat or handle food, particularly ready-to-eat food. Hand washing includes scrubbing all parts of your hands with soap for at least 20 seconds and rinsing them under warm water. Dry hands with a clean cloth or paper towel.

Wash and Sanitize Surfaces

Always wash and sanitize surfaces where you prepare and place foods. Many cases of food poisoning and contamination are caused by using the same cutting board, plate or utensil to prepare raw meat and ready-to-eat foods. Cutting boards, plates and utensils must always be washed and sanitized immediately before ready-to-eat foods are placed on them.

Remember, wash dishcloths as well! Warm and damp dishcloths can be ideal breeding grounds for bacteria. They are often used to wipe contaminated and other surfaces. This spreads harmful bacteria to areas where foods are placed. Dishcloths must be washed well and sanitized regularly.

You can make a sanitizing solution as follows:

- Mix 1/2 ounce or 1 tablespoon of 6 per cent household bleach into 1 gallon of water; or,
- Mix 1 teaspoon of 6 per cent bleach into 1 litre of water.

Prepare Food

Harmful bacteria and viruses can be spread from people to the food being prepared or handled. Some of these, such as Salmonella,

Hepatitis A and E.coli are then passed on to people who eat the food and get sick. Therefore, any person who gets sick and symptoms of diarrhea or vomiting, or who has infected cuts or sores, should not be allowed to handle food in any way.

If in Doubt, Throw it Out!

Finally, do not take chances with your food. Remember, contaminated foods may not look or smell bad so if in doubt, throw it out!

For More Information

For more information on food safety, see the following BC HealthFiles:

[#59b Food Safety for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables](#)

[#59c Food Safety: Instructions on Food Labels](#)

[#76 Foods to Avoid for People at Risk of Food-borne Illness](#)



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