Colchester

Food Hygiene Handbook For Your Family

Colchester Borough Council

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Foreword

Food safety issues are commony reported in our newspapers and on the television today, probably because everybody takes a keen interest in the products we consume. The Food and Safety team at Colchester work with local manufacturers and retailers to ensure the food supplied in the Borough is wholesome and fit to eat.

Despite our best efforts,the number of people in Colchester suffering food poisoning symptoms each year continues to grow in line with the National trend.

This booklet has been produced to assist the consumer in safe food handling and preparation in order to eliminate another area where bad practice can creep in.

I hope you find the contents informative and useful; please do not hesitate to contact me or any of the team if you have any questions or concerns.

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Alert – Food Poisoning!

Food poisoning is not something that happens to other people or only to people that eat out often. It can happen to anybody and is normally caused as a direct result of food being handled, stored, prepared or cooked badly.

As most people eat at home it is perhaps not surprising that most cases of food poisoning occur as a result of food prepared and cooked at home. Many cases go unreported but can affect the whole family.

People vary in their reaction to food poisoning. Healthy adults will tend to be more resistant than for instance young children, the elderly or people of any age that are already unwell.

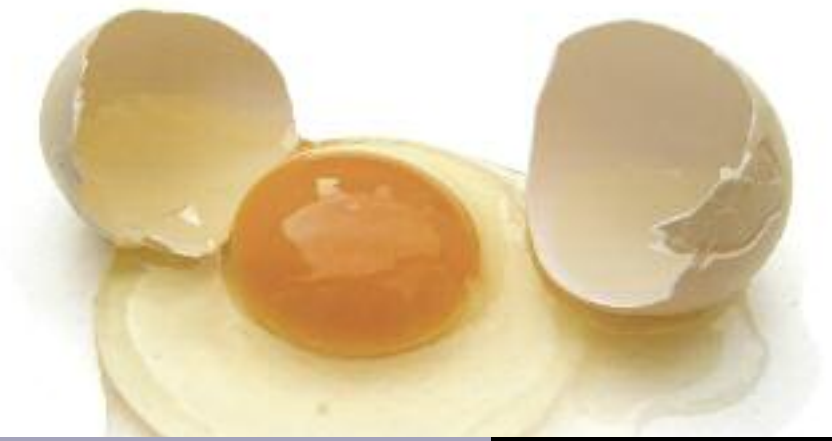
There are two ways of avoiding food poisoning:

1. Read and follow the simple guidelines contained in this booklet to keep yourself, your family and friends safe.

or

2. Stop eating!

Remember – there is in fact very little unsafe food, just unsafe ways of handling it.



Personal Hygiene

As many food poisoning organisms (germs) are carried by humans, everybody who handles food, including 'little helpers', must take extra care with personal hygiene.

Make sure hands are washed:

- Before starting to prepare food.
- Between handling different types of food.
- After using the toilet (and before if you are handling chillies!).
- After changing nappies or touching pets.
- After using handkerchiefs.
- After handling waste foods or bin-bags.
- After smoking.

Never:

- Cough or sneeze over food.
- Allow pets in the kitchen when preparing and cooking food.
- Use dropped food without thoroughly inspecting and washing it.
- Smoke in a food area.
- Handle food when you are unwell.

Always:

- Ensure that your kitchen and utensils are clean and in good condition.
- That you are wearing clean overclothing when preparing and cooking food.
- Remove jewellery – germs love it and it can break your teeth if it becomes an ingredient.

Remember – that when you are dealing with the sick, elderly or with children you must take extra care of both your own and their personal hygiene.

So how does food poisoning happen?

Food poisoning will occur if harmful bacteria are allowed to multiply in food to numbers that the body can not effectively deal with.

It may also occur as a result of eating food that has been in contact with harmful chemicals such as detergents or pesticides that have not been removed by thorough washing.

Micro-organisms (often referred to as "bugs" or "germs") can be roughly divided into three types:

- **Moulds** – which are visible.
- **Spoilage organisms** – which you can not see, but which leave visible evidence behind. (Slimy ham or bacon).

Most harmful however are:

- **Food poisoning pathogens** – which you can not see or taste and which leave no visual evidence. In sufficient numbers they can be very toxic.

This last group come with a wide variety of very unpleasant effects including vomiting, diarrhoea, headaches, stomach cramps to name but a few.

Most bacteria will only make you ill if they are consumed in huge numbers – millions. To reach these numbers they need to be given time in the right conditions.

Exceptions to this rule are bacteria such as Listeria (found in foods such as unpasturised cheese and yoghurts), and E. Coli (found in uncooked meats) these need far fewer numbers to make you ill making additional care important when handling these foods.

Food poisoning bacteria like temperatures between 5°C and 63°C. Any colder than 5°C and they will multiply slower, but not die. At temperatures above 75°C bacteria will die in high numbers. Any surviving bacteria however will begin to multiply when the temperature becomes favourable again.

Bacteria are not normally too fussy as to which food they live on and will move between foods if contact is made between them. This is called cross contamination.

To reduce the risk of food poisoning then we must:

- Prevent or reduce the bacteria multiplying and spreading to different foods.
- Kill the bacteria.
- Prevent any surviving bacteria from multiplying again.

How?

Bacteria can be prevented from spreading and multiplying by keeping food wrapped or covered at a temperature of less than 5°C or greater than 63°C.

- Bacteria will be killed in huge numbers above 75°C, so cooked food must reach this temperature all the way through the food.
- To prevent the few survivors from being able to multiply, the cooked food should be cooled quickly, wrapped and stored properly.

To make the booklet easier to use it has been divided in sections with hints in each to show how the risks above can be avoided.

The sections are:

- **Buying and transporting**
- **Storing**
- **Preparing**
- **Cooking and Cooling**
- **Storing and Cooling**
- **Reheating**

Buying

Always buy your food from a reputable supplier. This does not necessarily mean a national chain, but rather a supplier that you can rely on and trust. Look at a shop or market stall and the way it is kept and run.

1. Does the food on offer look fresh?
2. Are the staff and premises clean?
3. Do they handle the food with care?

If the answer to any of the above is no, then you probably do not want to shop there.

Are the staff smoking, eating or drinking while serving? They shouldn't be as this can transfer bacteria from their bodies to your food, the process is known as cross contamination.

When purchasing a variety of fresh unwrapped food from the same shop, i.e. cooked and raw meats, cheese etc., check that the assistants wash their hands between handling different products, use separate tongs or clean food wrap for differing products or that there is a different assistant for each product.

Try not to buy dented or damaged cans. They may be cheaper but if the seal is damaged then it may have allowed bacteria to enter and grow.

Never buy tins that are rusted or bulging.

Never buy a product with a broken seal or badly damaged packaging. The damage sustained will present a real risk of bacteriological contamination.

Avoid buying goods that are past the printed 'best before' date. Although retailers are allowed to sell goods that are past the 'best before' date the fact that this date has passed indicates that although the food is probably still safe it will not taste as good as the manufacturer intended.

Never buy food that is past its 'use by' date, the sale of food past this date is **illegal** because the 'use by' date is required to be shown on foods that are likely to support harmful bacteria which will, in all probability, have reached dangerous levels past this date.

Even food that is approaching its 'use by' date should be avoided unless you are sure that you will eat it before the date has passed or that you will be able to freeze it safely.

Plan you shopping carefully, Remember that frozen food should be kept frozen (below 18°C) and chilled food need to be kept chilled (between 0°C and 5°C). Buy these items last so that they are out of the freezer/chiller for less time. If possible take a cold box with you to get them home. If you don't have a cold box try placing the goods inside three plastic carrier bags, sealing them tightly and then placing them in a cardboard box (there are normally some lying around in most shops).

Take the food straight home; avoid long journeys and unnecessary delays on the way home. In warm or hot weather try to shop early or late to avoid the heat of the day.

Finally, when you get home put the frozen and chilled foods away first into either the refrigerator or freezer.

Remember – last in the basket, first out of the basket

Storage

Correct storage is critical to:

- Stop bacteria multiplying
- Stop food from deteriorating. (Bendy carrots are rarely a treat.)
- Help rotate foods to ensure they are eaten 'in date'.

Frozen Food

- Freezers should keep food at a minimum temperature of -18°C for long term storage (3 months plus).
- Food should be tightly sealed or wrapped before freezing.
- Date and label food before freezing.

Refrigerators

- Fridges should be ideally set between 0°C and +4°C to reduce bacterial multiplication. (Do not let your fridge go below 0°C or your vegetables and salads will loose their texture).

- Fridges have colder and warmer areas, you can find out where they are by using a fridge thermometer. If the fridge has an ice making compartment, the coldest area is usually just below it.
- Take extra care with any product that will be eaten without further cooking that would kill bacteria e.g. cooked meats, patê etc.

It may be obvious but there is little point in storing safe food in an unsafe refrigerator or freezer. Therefore it is important that you:

- Defrost regularly.
- Keep your appliances clean and in good working order.
- Do not overload fridges and freezers since overloading will reduce circulation causing a rise in temperature.
- Make sure your fridge and freezer are positioned in a cool, well ventilated area. It's never a good idea to place a fridge or freezer next to a cooker or radiator.
- Never leave the doors open for longer than absolutely necessary as this will raise the inside temperature and allow bacteria to multiply.
- Treat door seals with care and regularly inspect them for damage. Damaged door seals will cause excessive icing which will prevent the fridge from maintaining the correct temperature.
- Stack your fridge properly and always wrap or cover food to stop bacteria from going from one food to another, (cross contamination).

Top Shelf – Desserts

Middle Shelf – Cheese, Dairy & wrapped cooked meats

Bottom Shelf – Raw and defrosting meat and poultry in covered containers.

- Make sure that containers used for defrosting raw meat and poultry are large enough to hold all the juices released during defrosting.
- Do not store tinned food in the opened tin – once open to the air many foods will react with the container and go bad quickly.

In the event of a power cut do not open the fridge or freezer. This will raise the temperature and cause the food to become unsafe. If unopened the food will normally remain safe for up to 24 hours.

Dry Goods (Tins, Rice, Pasta etc.)

Keep these in a cool, dry place. Avoid storing rice and pasta in cupboards that are likely to be affected by steam, such as over the cooker, as this can cause them to deteriorate.

Vegetables

Keep these in a cool, dry place.

Labels

Always read the emanufacturers label and follow the instructions.s Many products, for example, will say ‘refrigerate after opening and consume within 7 days’. Such products are safe to store at room temperature while sealed but the introduction of air on opening will cause them to deteriorate. Refrigeration will slow the deterioration.

Preparation

Preparation plays a very important part in food safety as bacteria can be introducted to food during preparation by contact with hands, work surfaces, utensils or by cross contamination from other food.

Bacteria will multiply rapidly when the temperature is favourable, so don't remove food from the refrigerator too far in advance and return it when preparation is finished.

Plan your food preparation carefully. Ensure that you have all the ingredients to hand, this will avoid food being left out while you fetch the missing ones.

If frozen meat or poultry are part of the recipe make sure you have allowed sufficient time for it to be fully defrosted in the fridge.

Make sure that all surfaces, chopping boards and utensils are clean – if you haven't used a piece of equipment for a while – wash it.

Disinfectants and sanitisers take time to kill bacteria so don't spray it on and wipe it off. Leave it in contact with the surfaces for at least 3 minutes or in line with the manufacturers instructions.

After cleaning, wash you hands and put on clean overclothing.

Wash all ingredients under clean, running water. This will remove surface contamination.

Do not use the contents of cans, jars, pouches etc. that 'fizz' or 'spurt' when opened.

If ingredients 'smell of' dispose of them rather than take a chance. If in doubt throw it out.

If you use wooden spoons dispose of them if they become cracked, split or damaged.

Don't forget to wash salads and fruit to remove surface contamination and pesticide residues, even organic produce will have been handled and carry bacteria.

Remember – clean up as you go.
It will reduce the chances of cross contamination,
reduce the chances of bacterial multiplication,
as well as making it easier to work and
quicker to finish at the end of cooking.

Cooking

Use clean utensils.

Read the recipe or follow the manufacturers cooking instructions and make sure they are compatible with your appliances. This is especially important with microwaves where the power rating may vary.

When using a microwave, don't forget the standing time to allow the heat to penetrate totally.

Ensure that the food reaches at least 75°C right the way through. This is particularly important when cooking poultry, large joints, and large dense pies.

Test to make sure the food is cooked by either inserting a temperature probe or, in the case of poultry, by inserting a thin

sharp pointed knife through the thickest part (the thigh joint) to ensure the juicers run clear and that there is no sign of blood.

Take extra care with high-risk foods like poultry, game, patê, burgers and sausages especially if they are to be eaten cold.

Don't

- Try to rush the cooking time by turning up the heat. You will only succeed in burning the outside while the inside remains uncooked, complete with thriving bacteria.
- Keep a meal warm, under 62°C, as already explained this will allow any surviving bacteria to begin multiplying again. It is better to cool the meal quickly and then thoroughly reheat when needed. It is safe to keep a meal hot, over 63°C for short periods.
- Prepare cold dishes, including salads, too far in advance and then leave out at room temperature.

Do

- Serve the meal as soon as possible after cooking. This will prevent surviving bacteria from multiplying as the food cools.

Cooling and Storing

If you have cooked a batch load for the freezer, or have left overs that you wish to re-use cool them as quickly as possible and leave out definitely no longer than 90 minutes. Refrigerate or freeze immediately after cooling.

You can safely reduce the cooling time by:

- Dividing into smaller portions.
- Slicing large joints.
- Placing the food, in a container if necessary, on a cooling rack or in a large container filled with ice.
- Placing the food in a cool, well ventilated area (but not in the open air or by an open window unless it has been screened to prevent flies and other pests from entering).
- Placing a fan near the cooling food.
- Regular stirring.

Always cover cooling food but not with something that will allow any condensation that forms to drip back onto the food. Always wrap, label and date the foods you keep.

Never place hot or very warm food into a refrigerator or freezer as this will raise the internal temperature of the appliance and therefore put the entire contents at risk.

Reheating

When reheating ensure that the food is hot (+75°C) all the way through, and serve immediately.

Test to make sure the food is thoroughly reheated by inserting a temperature probe.

This is particularly important with high-risk food such as meat and poultry and especially important when reheating cooked rice.

Never reheat food more than once.

Extras

Washing up should be done in clean, hot water (so do wear gloves!) with detergent. The detergent will cut through the grease while the hot water kills the bacteria. You can kill more bacteria at slightly lower temperatures by using a detergent with a bactericidal agent.

After washing up, rinse thoroughly in clean, hot water and allow to dry. Avoid the use of tea towels as you may end up putting as many bacteria on as you wiped off.

Store your crockey, cutlery and other utensils in clean cupboards and drawers.

Empty the waste bins regularly and make sure they have a close fitting lid.

Home based catering

In principle there is no reason why a small scale food business cannot be operated hygienically from domestic premises provided you have registered yourself as a food business with the Food and Safety Team. Before starting such a business however it is worth consulting the local authority's planning officers to make sure that you are not contravening planning regulations.

You must remember that the domestic kitchen then becomes a food room subject to the food hygiene legislation and inspection.

All surfaces in contact with food should be sound and easy to clean. Good quality kitchen worktops and kitchen equipment in a well maintained condition should meet this requirement.

Adequate provision (including a hot and cold water supply) should be made for cleaning equipment and food. A normal kitchen sink will usually suffice but certain activities may occasionally require a double bowl sink so that food washing can be separated effectively from equipment cleaning. There should be easy access to a wash basin. No toilet should open directly into the food room.

Food should be protected from risk of contamination. Windows and doors should be kept closed to prevent the entry of flies. Any domestic pets should be kept out of the kitchen whilst it is being used for the business. If there is a washing machine in the kitchen, it need not be removed but no dirty laundry should be brought into the area whilst it is being used for the business.

Adequate facilties should be provided for maintaining suitable food temperature conditions. Ideally, provision of a separate refrigerator for the business should be considered. The operating temperatures of all refrigerators and freezers should be checked regularly and a record kept. Further advice on how these issues will apply to your specific circumstances should be obtained from the Food and Safety Team.

Special notes for outside caterers

Whether you are a professional caterer working from home, a voluntary worker involved in cooking or even if you intend catering for your own family wedding or other event, the following will apply to **you**.

You:

- are responsible for the safety of the food.
- must ensure that you have the facilities and capability to prepare, cook, store, transport, reheat and serve the food safely and within the law.
- must (if you are a home or outside caterer) be registered with your local Food and Safety or environmental health department.
- must (if you are a caterer or voluntary worker) be appropriately trained and have premises that comply with the law. Colchester Borough Council run regular courses on basic food hygiene. For further information ring Colchester 282582.

Thank you for taking the time to read this booklet. We hope that it has given you some useful tips on how to avoid food poisoning.

Just out of interest, bacteria multiply by dividing into two approximately every 10 mins.

This means that if you have a piece of ham in normal room temperature with a safe level of bacteria e.g. 1,500, by the time you will have read this book thoroughly (say 2 hours) it now has 6,144,000 bacteria!