



## Food safety when outdoors

This fact sheet provides general food safety information for persons eating outdoors.

### Introduction

Barbeques, picnics, camping, hiking, fishing and boating are a great way to have fun and adventure outdoors with family and friends. However, eating outdoors can present opportunities for food-borne illnesses (food poisoning) to occur and the risk increases because:

- harmful bacteria grow more easily when food is stored in the 'temperature danger zone' of between 5°C and 60°C
- facilities for cleaning and hand washing may be inadequate and a safe water supply may not always be available
- food can be exposed to contamination from the environment, insects, pests and animals.

### Planning

Undertaking activities outdoors involves improvised situations and the comforts and conveniences of home are not always available. Planning can minimise the risk of getting food poisoning. Keeping food safe and suitable requires careful consideration about:

- the type of food you bring (i.e. does it require refrigeration?)
- the availability of a safe water supply
- food storage (e.g. temperature control and protecting food from contamination)
- cleaning and personal hygiene (e.g. hand washing)
- food handling practices.

### Vulnerable populations

Some people are more at risk of getting food poisoning than others. Vulnerable groups include pregnant women, the elderly, young children and anyone with an illness. Special care should be taken with their food.

### Potentially hazardous foods

Harmful (food poisoning) bacteria grow more easily in and on some foods than others. These 'potentially hazardous' foods support the growth of bacteria that may cause illness and include:

- raw and cooked meat (including hams, salamis, chicken and turkey) or foods containing meat, such as casseroles, curries and lasagne
- dairy products, for example, milk, custard and dairy based desserts
- seafood (excluding live seafood)
- processed fruits and vegetables, for example, prepared salads, coleslaws and rice salads
- cooked rice and pasta
- foods containing eggs, beans, nuts or other protein rich foods, such as quiche and soy products
- foods that contain these foods, such as sandwiches and rolls.

## Food storage

The temperature of food and the time it remains at that temperature is critical to food safety. If food remains in the temperature danger zone of between 5°C and 60°C for a total of:

- less than 2 hours, it must be chilled or used immediately
- longer than 2 hours but less than 4 hours, it must be used immediately
- 4 hours or longer, it must be thrown out.

The use of potentially hazardous foods should be kept to a minimum unless the food can be kept cold (5°C or lower) or hot (60°C or higher).

In addition, the following measures should apply when storing food:

- store any raw meats and seafood in an insulated cooler, separate from other food
- ensure all foods are adequately wrapped or stored in separate leak-proof containers to prevent spoilage and contamination
- do not allow cooked and raw foods to come into contact with each other. This could lead to cross contamination of harmful bacteria from raw food (e.g. meat, seafood, vegetables) to cooked food
- use plenty of ice or cold packs around the food and keep eskies closed as much as possible to avoid temperature loss
- where possible use separate eskies for the storage of raw food, cooked food and drinks
- if cooked foods, fruits and salad ingredients are stored in the same esky with raw foods, ensure they are stored above raw foods and are wrapped and protected to prevent juices from coming into contact with other foods
- maintain a constant temperature check on eskies, portable fridges or electric coolers. Eskies can be fitted with small thermometers
- do not use eskies intended to hold food for human consumption for the storage of fish bait
- be extra careful with the handling and storage of caught seafood. Seafood quality diminishes as soon as it leaves the water. Ice the fish as soon as possible after catching.

## Food handling, preparation and cleaning

Proper food handling, preparation and cleaning practices are essential in minimising the risk of food contamination. Key points to follow are:

- wash, cut, and prepare all meats and other potentially hazardous foods beforehand to reduce the need to handle foods.
- thoroughly wash all foods that will be eaten raw such as fruits and salads, especially if stored in an esky with raw meats.
- if you need to cool down hot food, place it in the portable fridge/esky after it has stopped steaming. Allowing it to stand on a benchtop for extended periods provides a perfect breeding environment for harmful bacteria. Divide large quantities of food into small, shallow containers for faster cooling.
- ensure eskies and other food storage containers are regularly cleaned, especially after emptying out melted ice water. Rinse with clean water before use.
- when cooking mince, sausages, hamburger patties, rolled roasts, pork and chicken, ensure they are cooked right through until there is no pink left. Alternatively test with a probe thermometer for a minimum internal temperature of 74°C or more..
- reheat leftovers quickly until steaming hot.
- wash chopping boards after use.

- don't place cooked food on plates which have been used for raw products such as meat, poultry and seafood; wash them first.
- be extra careful with the Christmas hams/turkeys. It provides an ideal source of contamination due to:
  - constant handling by family (adults & children).
  - difficulty maintaining temperature below 5°C due to size
  - use of unclean tea towels as covers
  - pre-cut ham/turkey and store in either sealed containers or aluminium foil below 5°C.

## Personal hygiene

Our health is in our hands. Clean hands will significantly decrease the possibility of food contamination and food poisoning.

Wash hands thoroughly (including brushing under nails) before and after:

- handling raw meat, seafood & vegetables
- handling utensils and equipment
- smoking
- going to the toilet
- handling rubbish
- touching your hair, nose or other body parts
- handling pets
- nappy changing.

Use soap, clean running water and disposable paper towels when washing and drying hands. In cases where reticulated (Council) water is not available to the area, use antibacterial gels and sterile disposable wipes. Cloth towels can support the growth of harmful bacteria.

## Water supply

A safe water supply is the most important requirement for good health in the outdoors as it is necessary for drinking, preparing and cooking food, cleaning utensils and helping to maintain personal hygiene. It is advisable that wherever practical, adequate supplies of safe water (eg. town supplies, bottled water) be obtained for the duration of your stay in the outdoors. If this is not practical, water obtained from other sources should be treated as unsafe until suitable precautions have been taken.

Guidance on ensuring safe water:

- use only reticulated (Council), bottled, boiled or treated water – in that order of preference – for drinking, cooking or preparing food, washing utensils and surfaces, brushing teeth, hand washing, making ice and bathing.
- only treat contaminated water if no safe drinking water can be obtained.
- always obtain water from the least contaminated source available to you (clear, running water is preferable).
- filter cloudy water through a clean cloth or allow it to settle and then pour off the clear water for boiling. Bring water to the boil, then leave it to cool and store in a clean, covered container. Boiling will ensure water is safe from most types of harmful bugs but will not remove chemical contaminants.
- only if water cannot be boiled, treat it with chlorine or iodine tablets. Follow the manufacturer's directions with the tablets. It should be noted that this form of water treatment may not kill all the bugs and won't remove chemical contaminants.

- advice on the effectiveness of alternative disinfection methods should be sought from suitably qualified professionals.
- portable filters (absolute pore size 0.1- 0.4 microns) can be used to remove certain pathogens but not all. It is recommended that filtered water be chemically disinfected before consumption.
- thoroughly clean any containers used to store water with hot soapy drinking quality water. Rinse thoroughly with drinking quality water before use.

## Other hints

- dispose of melted ice water in eskies. Do not use for consumption, washing of salads or food preparation as it may be contaminated especially if it contains blood from thawed meat or seafood.
- do not use ice from the esky to ice drinks as the ice may be contaminated. Ice intended for drinks should be stored separately and protected from potential contamination.
- minimise direct hand contact with ice used for the chilling of food especially ready-to-eat foods.
- thoroughly heat and clean BBQ plates.
- ensure dining areas are cleaned to eliminate or reduce contamination.
- minimise the use of tea towels and dishcloths as they may be a source of harmful bacterial growth if used incorrectly. Let dishes air dry.
- dispose of cracked eggs as they may be a source of harmful bacteria (such as Salmonella).
- do not wash pet dishes in the same wash up water used for other dishes.
- keep animals out of food preparation area.

## What to do if you get food poisoning

The symptoms of food poisoning may include diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, fever and headaches. If a person is suffering from one or more of these symptoms they should:

- consult a doctor. The doctor will be able to provide any treatment that is necessary. It is important that a faecal (stool) specimen be taken, to assist with any investigation into the cause of the food-borne illness.
- recover suspect food and place in a leak proof container in a refrigerator for collection by Queensland Health if deemed necessary. Do not freeze the food. Label it appropriately.
- take note of all foods and drinks consumed two to three days prior to onset of symptoms. This is very important as food poisoning may be caused by food consumed three days or more prior to onset of symptoms. Note the names and contact numbers of any other person affected .
- report the matter to the local Queensland Health Public Health Unit, particularly if a friend or associate is suffering similar symptoms associated with the consumption of the same food. Any other associated cases should also be encouraged to consult a doctor and lodge their own details with Queensland Health for investigation.

## Things to remember

- **pack and store food and utensils safely**
- **clean and rinse food, equipment and hands thoroughly**
- **cook and reheat food thoroughly to above 60°C**
- **chill food to below 5°C**
- **separate and cover food.**

## For further information

For further information or to speak to a Public Health Unit, please call 13 Health (432584). Alternatively, a variety of fact sheets with detailed information on food safety can be accessed from the Department of Health's website at [www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety).

If you would like to speak to your local government, contact details can be found on the local government directory at [www.dsdip.qld.gov.au/local-government-directory](http://www.dsdip.qld.gov.au/local-government-directory) or your local White Pages.

