

Your guide to food safety

Enjoy your food. Don't let it turn nasty

This leaflet explains simple ways to make sure the food that you buy and take home to prepare for yourself, your family or friends remains safe.

Victorian and Australian food safety laws are designed to ensure that the food you buy is safe.

All Victorian food businesses such as supermarkets, delis, butchers, fishmongers, take-away shops and restaurants, have to comply with these laws and standards by selling food that is safe to eat and free of any contamination.

Food businesses have a responsibility for selling food that is safe to eat.

Enjoy your food. But remember, it's up to you to make sure it does not turn nasty.

Food poisoning

Food poisoning is frequently caused by bacteria from food that has been poorly handled, stored or cooked. The food may look, taste and smell normal.

Some people are more at risk from food poisoning including young children, pregnant women, the elderly and people with other illnesses.

The symptoms of food poisoning may vary depending on the type of bacteria or contaminants causing the illness. You may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Nausea
- Stomach cramps
- Diarrhoea
- Fever
- Headaches

Symptoms can occur within 30 minutes after eating, or a number of hours later.

They can be mild or severe. Some bacteria can also cause other symptoms. Listeria bacteria may cause miscarriage or other serious illness in susceptible people.

Where to get help

- See your doctor.
- Report your illness to your local council health department or the Department of Human Services, particularly if you think the illness is related to food that you have purchased or eaten so that the cause can be investigated.

High-risk food

Food poisoning bacteria are often naturally present in food, and in the right conditions a single bacterium can grow into more than two million bacteria in just seven hours.

Bacteria grow and multiply on some types of food more easily than on others. The types of foods which bacteria prefer include:

- Meat
- Poultry
- Dairy Products
- Eggs
- Smallgoods, like salami and ham
- Seafood
- Cooked rice
- Cooked pasta
- Prepared salads, like coleslaws, pasta salads and rice salads
- Prepared fruit salads

Ready-to-eat foods

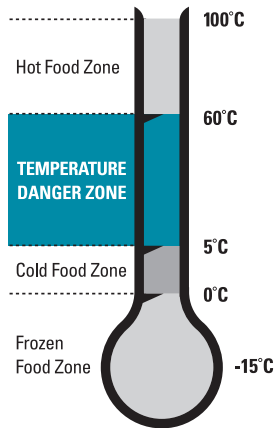
Ready-to-eat foods are foods that can be eaten without further preparation or cooking such as pre-prepared salads, take-aways and prepared sandwiches.

Ten easy steps to safe food...

1. Buy from reputable suppliers with clean premises.
2. Avoid spoiled foods, foods past their use-by dates or foods in damaged containers or packaging.
3. Take chilled, frozen, or hot foods straight home in insulated containers.
4. Keep raw foods and ready-to-eat foods separate.
5. Avoid high-risk foods left in the Temperature Danger Zone for more than 4 hours.
6. Keep high-risk foods out of the Temperature Danger Zone. Keep chilled foods cold at 5°C or colder and hot food hot at 60°C or hotter.
7. Thoroughly wash and dry hands when preparing food.
8. Use separate and clean utensils for raw foods and ready-to-eat foods.
9. Cook minced meats, poultry, fish and sausages thoroughly.
10. When in doubt, throw it out.

Keep your food in the 'right' zone!

A basic rule-of-thumb is to keep 'high-risk' foods in the right temperature zone for as long as possible.



Avoid leaving high-risk foods in the Temperature Danger Zone.

When shopping:

- Buy your chilled and frozen foods towards the end of your shopping trip.
- Hot chickens and other hot foods should also be purchased later in your trip and kept separate from cold food.

When storing and transporting food:

- Keep chilled food at 5°C or colder.
- Use a fridge thermometer to check the temperature in your fridge. The temperature should be below 5°C.
- Keep frozen food frozen solid.
- Keep the freezer temperature around -15°C to -18°C.
- Keep hot foods at 60°C or hotter.
- Throw out high-risk food left in the Temperature Danger Zone for more than 4 hours.
- Consume high-risk food left in the Temperature Danger Zone for more than 2 hours—don't keep it for later.

Choose carefully when buying food

Even if food producers and sellers have followed the food safety laws, the quality and safety of the food can sometimes be affected by how it is handled by you, the consumer.

Once you purchase food, the safety of that food also becomes your responsibility.

- Only buy from reputable suppliers with clean and tidy premises.
- Check use-by dates and labels, avoid food past its use-by dates.
- Check food labels for allergen and nutritional information.
- Avoid products in damaged, dented, swollen or leaking cans, containers or other packaging.
- Avoid food that seems spoiled, such as mouldy or discoloured products.
- Check that serving staff use separate tongs when handling separate food types.
- Only buy eggs in cartons that identify the supplier—avoid cracked or soiled eggs.
- Avoid high-risk chilled and frozen foods that have been left out of the fridge and freezer.
- Avoid hot foods that are not steaming hot.
- Avoid ready-to-eat foods left uncovered on counters.
- Prevent meat, chicken or fish juices leaking onto other products.

If you have serious concerns with the way food is handled, stored or prepared by a business, contact your local council health department.

Get food home quickly

- If you have purchased hot, chilled or frozen foods, you should get them home as quickly as possible.
- For trips longer than about 30 minutes, or on very hot days, it's a good idea to take an insulated cooler or bag with an ice pack, to keep chilled or frozen foods cold.
- Consider placing hot foods in an insulated container for trips longer than about 30 minutes.
- Consider wrapping hot foods in foil.
- Once you arrive home, immediately transfer chilled and frozen food into your fridge and freezer.

Take extra care when taking food outside the home

Enjoy picnics, eating outdoors, and taking food to work or school. Take extra care when preparing, storing and handling food.

- Cut meats into serving-size pieces before leaving home, and have all salads ready to eat.
- Put raw meats and high-risk foods into separate leak-proof containers and into insulated coolers.
- Place containers with raw meats at the bottom of an insulated cooler and keep separate from ready-to-eat foods.
- Avoid packing food that has just been cooked or is still warm, unless you can keep it out of the Temperature Danger Zone. Refrigerate overnight before packing.
- Pack plenty of ice packs around chilled foods. Frozen drinks can serve as ice packs, especially in school lunches.
- Don't place ready-to-eat food into containers used for storing raw food without thoroughly washing and drying the containers first.
- Consider using disposable wipes if there is no safe water for hand washing.

Store food well

Keep food out of harm's way by:

- Keeping high-risk chilled food in the fridge.
- Keeping frozen foods frozen hard.
- Storing foods in clean, non-toxic, food storage containers.
- Covering food in leak-proof containers with tight-fitting lids or wrap in foil or plastic film.
- Storing cooked foods separately from raw foods.
- Storing raw meats, seafood and chicken at the bottom of the fridge, in sealed or covered containers.
- Storing left-overs in the fridge. Packaged food and food from cans and jars can become high-risk once opened.
- Not storing food in opened cans.
- Avoiding egg, dairy and meat products past their use-by dates.

Wash hands when preparing food

- Wash hands in warm, soapy water before preparing food for at least 30 seconds.
- Wash your hands thoroughly before preparing food and after handling raw meats, chicken, seafood, eggs and unwashed vegetables.
- Dry your hands with clean towels or disposable towels.
- If you have any cuts or wounds on your hands, cover them with waterproof wound-strips or bandages.
- Wear clean, protective clothes like an apron when preparing food.
- If you feel unwell, let someone else prepare the food.

Keep things clean and separate

Prevent quality food from turning nasty by keeping things clean and separate.

- Keep raw foods separate from ready-to-eat foods.
- Use separate and clean utensils and equipment for ready-to-eat food.
- Don't use the same equipment and utensils for raw foods and for ready-to-eat foods, without thoroughly cleaning them first.
- Thoroughly clean and dry cutting-boards, knives, pans, plates, containers and other utensils after using them.
- Use hot soapy water to wash things and ensure they are thoroughly dry before using them again.
- Use fresh clean tea-towels or disposable towels to dry utensils and equipment, otherwise allow them to air-dry.
- Use a dishwasher with appropriate detergents to wash and dry utensils and equipment.
- Rinse raw fruits and vegetables with clean water before using them.
- Avoid pets around areas where food is prepared or stored.
- Remove pests and vermin from where food is prepared or stored.

Use the fridge to thaw frozen food

Bacteria can grow in frozen food while it is thawing, so keep frozen food out of the Temperature Danger Zone.

- Unless instructions direct otherwise, thaw frozen food in the fridge or use a microwave oven.
- If instructed on packaged frozen food, prepare and cook the food as directed, straight from the freezer.
- Defrost frozen meats, fish and poultry thoroughly before cooking.
- Keep defrosted food in the fridge until it is ready to be cooked.
- If defrosting using a microwave oven, cook the food immediately after defrosting.
- If you are using a microwave oven, speed-up the thawing by separating defrosted portions from still-frozen portions.
- Avoid re-freezing thawed food.

Cook it right

One of the most important things you can do to stop food turning nasty is to cook it thoroughly, especially high-risk foods.

- Cook poultry until the meat is white—there should be no pink flesh.
- Cook hamburgers, mince, sausages, and rolled or stuffed roasts right through until any juices run clear.
- Cook white fish until it flakes easily with a fork.
- Most foods should be cooked to at least 75°C.
- Use a meat thermometer to help you get the temperature right. Meat thermometers are available from many retail stores that sell kitchen utensils and barbecue equipment.
- Thoroughly cook foods made from eggs such as omelettes and baked egg custards.
- Take extra care when preparing foods where the eggs remain uncooked such as egg-nog and home-made mayonnaise, as bacteria on the egg shells can contaminate the food.

Cooling and reheating food

- Reheat foods thoroughly so they are steaming (above 75°C) or boiling.
- Keep cooked food out of the Temperature Danger Zone.
- If you need to store food for later use, once the steam stops rising cover it and put it in the fridge.
- When you cook ahead of time, divide large portions of food into small shallow containers for refrigeration.
- If you don't want to cool the food straight away, keep hot food at a temperature of 60°C or hotter.

For more information on food safety contact:

- Food Safety Hotline 1300 364 352 or email foodsafety@dhs.vic.gov.au
 - Your local council health department
- Visit
www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
www.safefood.net.au
www.foodstandards.gov.au