

Food safety tips for summer activities

Each year about 200, 000 New Zealanders become sick with foodborne illness, with almost half these cases due to mishandling food in the home.

Summer is a time when many of these illnesses surface as temperatures soar and food preparation shifts from the kitchen to backyard barbeques and picnic areas.

Canterbury DHB Health Protection Officers Sue McEwan and Debbie Smith have some ideas on how to enjoy al fresco dining without the risk of illness.

A foodborne illness is more commonly known as food poisoning. Bacteria such as *Campylobacter*, *Salmonella* or *E. coli* and many others multiply faster on food in moist, warm conditions and may lead to symptoms such as diarrhoea, vomiting and stomach cramps.

Someone with Norovirus (if ill or have no symptoms) can shed the virus while preparing food, and spread the illness to others when they eat the food. The consequences of foodborne illness can be very serious for the young, elderly or those with low immunity.

Protecting yourself and your family from foodborne illnesses

The three Cs – clean, cook and chill – are among the most effective ways to ensure you keep your food safe and you and your family healthy.

Wash and dry hands thoroughly (wash and dry for 20 seconds each) or use an alcohol hand sanitiser:

- before handling food;
- after handling raw meat and poultry;
- going to the toilet; or
- handling pets and gardening.

Use a clean set of utensils and plates for raw food and another for cooked meats. All chopping boards and utensils should be scrubbed with hot soapy water after they have been in contact with raw meat.

Defrost meats thoroughly before cooking them, preferably in the fridge. Plan ahead as one to two days may be needed. Cook straight away if defrosting in the microwave.

Make sure burgers, sausages, pork and poultry are cooked until the juices run clear and they are not pink in the middle – especially if you're cooking on the barbeque. Eat food as soon as possible after it is cooked and only re-heat it once.

Cover all food before storing in the fridge or cupboard. Keep food covered in the fridge if necessary until you're ready to eat it.

It's a good idea to throw out any food that can go off once it's been left at room temperature for more than two hours.

All leftovers should be refrigerated or put in a chilly bin.



Protecting yourself when eating outdoors

Take food to a picnic or barbeque in a chilly bin with icepacks.

Cover food if you're eating outside – to avoid attracting flies, wasps and bees. Flies can carry lots of germs from the other things they've landed on or been digesting (such as dead animals or animal faeces). Flies also leave contaminated saliva and poo behind.

Food safety advice for campers this summer

Fully serviced camping grounds should have freezers or fridge space you can use. So pack food with icepacks for travelling and use local shops to restock perishable items when needed.

Camping in an area with no facilities requires careful planning.

- Plan your meals in advance around foods that travel and store easily.
- Use canned and freeze dried food where possible.
- Freeze meat in meal size portions. Layer with icepacks in the chilly bin and store the chilly bin in the coolest shadiest place you can find. Cover with wet towels. Only open when absolutely necessary.
- Cook and eat meat as soon as it has defrosted.
- Cook what you need.
- Leave the poultry or fish at home.



Avoid drinking from streams, lakes or other untreated water sources in an area with no kitchen facilities. Take clean water or large water containers to sterilise water in. Use this water for washing fruit and vegetables, as well as washing hands and cleaning teeth.

What to do if you think you have a foodborne illness

Seek advice from your general practice if you think you may have food poisoning after attending a function or eating in a food premises.

Anyone with vomiting or diarrhoea should stay away from public places until 48 hours after their symptoms have subsided.

What to do if your freezer breaks down

You may come back from holiday and find your freezer was either turned off, the door left partially open during the last minute rush to pack, or a neighbour tells you that there was a power-cut.

Tell-tale signs of freezer issues can be:

- a puddle of liquid under the freezer;
- the ice cream has melted and refrozen with most of its volume gone;
- thaw drip has refrozen on other foods in the freezer; or
- foods all stuck together in funny shapes.

Food is likely to be fine if power was off or out for only a few hours and the freezer was not opened during this time – as it didn't get a chance to defrost.

Thawing may have occurred if the power was off for longer (two to three days). So food may be spoiled and be unsafe to cook and eat. If in doubt throw it out – and ring your insurance company for advice.