

Act on Food Safety

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SUMMER/AUTUMN 2008

Fruit and vegetables – food safety issues

A great variety of fruit and vegetables are available for sale throughout the year. Care needs to be taken in preparing fruit and vegetables.

Cutting fruit [melons]

Due to their relatively large size, melons are frequently sold pre-cut and wrapped. The process of cutting can transfer microorganisms from the fruit skin to the cut surface and increase the potential for pathogens to survive and multiply. The food poisoning bacteria *Salmonella* can grow at room temperature when transferred onto cut melon surfaces. All equipment used in preparing cut melons must be clean and sanitised. Cut melons should be stored under refrigeration at temperatures of 5°C or below.

Fruit and vegetable salads

There is increasing demand for fresh-cut or ready-to-eat fruit and vegetables to meet the consumer need for quick and convenient products. Pre-prepared salads like coleslaws, pasta salads, rice salads, pre-packaged fruit and vegetable salads, ready-to-eat foods from self-service salad bars or retail outlets are considered high-risk foods.

If care is not taken when preparing, displaying and storing fruit and vegetables,

food poisoning bacteria will grow and multiply.

Preparation:

- Wash your hands thoroughly before cleaning fruit and vegetables.
- Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly. Use potable water and a clean cloth or brush to scrub the produce vigorously. Washing fruit and vegetables before eating them reduces the bacterial contamination considerably.
- Trim bruises, stems and any damaged areas.

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- Do not place or prepare fruit and vegetables alongside or on the same surfaces as raw meat or eggs.
- Use designated knives and cutting boards. A good practice is to colour code the chopping boards and use the same one specifically for fruit and vegetables.
- Thoroughly clean and dry cutting boards, knives, pans, plates, containers and other utensils after using them.

Food display [salad bars]

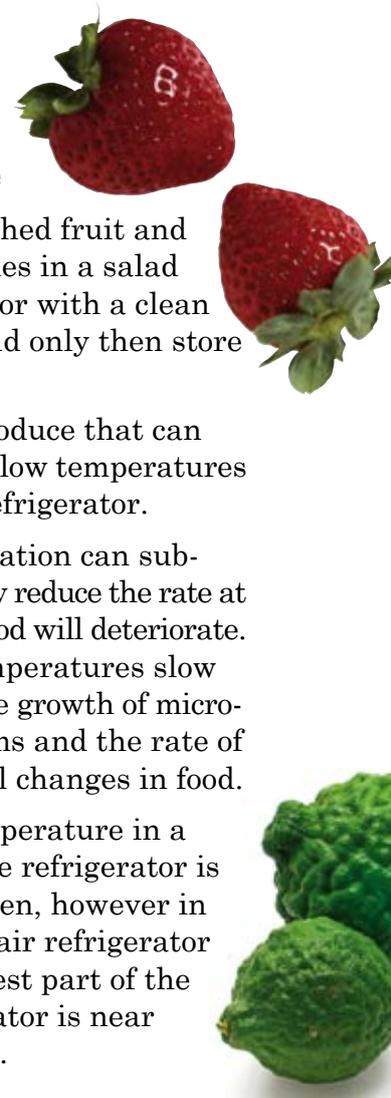
- Keep all salad bar surfaces clean;

In the United States, in 2006, 199 people fell ill, 102 needed hospital care and three died after eating baby spinach contaminated with *E. coli*.

- Provide sneeze guards in order to protect the food from contamination;
- Provide plenty of tongs for customers to use;
- Serving staff must use separate tongs when handling different types of food;
- Make sure plenty of plates are available for customers so that a new plate can be used on each visit to the salad bar;
- Place signs to identify all foods on display.

Storage

- Dry washed fruit and vegetables in a salad spinner or with a clean towel and only then store them.
- Keep produce that can tolerate low temperatures in the refrigerator.
- Refrigeration can substantially reduce the rate at which food will deteriorate. Low temperatures slow down the growth of microorganisms and the rate of chemical changes in food.
- The temperature in a frost-free refrigerator is fairly even, however in a moist air refrigerator the coolest part of the refrigerator is near the coils.



Storing food in the fridge

Always check that the fridge temperature is set to 5°C or below.

Do not overcrowd food. Allow air to circulate around the food.

Always cover food appropriately.

Keep raw and cooked food separated.

Store ready to eat food above raw foods.

Where ever you store raw meats and poultry make sure that juices do not drip onto other foods.

Use a fridge thermometer to check the temperature in your fridge. **It is a requirement to have a thermometer and to use it.**

Meat and ingredients like mayonnaise, cheese, butter and other food that are normally stored in the refrigerator should be taken out only just prior to being used in cooking.

Throw out food which is going off, because putting it in a colder part of the refrigerator will not stop it

deteriorating further. It can taint other food.

Store food you want to keep for a long time, or items like seafood which are quite susceptible to spoilage, in the coldest part of the refrigerator.

Foods with strong odours, such as seafood and some cheeses, should be wrapped. Avoid storing them for long periods near food such as milk and cream, which are susceptible to tainting.



Thawing frozen food

Some frozen foods, particularly vegetables, should be used direct from the frozen state.

Thaw frozen food in the fridge or in a microwave oven. If meat, poultry or fish are thawed at temperatures above 5°C, there is an opportunity for food poisoning organisms to grow.

Large cuts of frozen meat and poultry need to be thawed before use. This should be done in the refrigerator at a temperature below 5°C to stop the growth of food poisoning bacteria. At least 24 to 48 hours in the refrigerator is usually required to thaw reasonably sized portions of foods such as whole chickens or rolled

roasts. Special care is necessary when thawing and cooking turkeys or large pieces (more than 3 kg) of meat.

If frozen meat has to be used at short notice it should still be thawed before cooking. This can be done under cool running water without unwrapping the meat or in a microwave oven.

Thawed food should not be refrozen. It can be stored safely in the chilling section of the refrigerator for up to 48 hours if it has been thawed properly under controlled conditions in the refrigerator. Remember, foods that have been defrosted will not last as long as fresh foods.

Fridges and freezers

Locate your fridge in an area with adequate air space to allow it to operate effectively. Leave sufficient space around fridges and freezers for air circulation. Do not place them near hot stoves and ovens.

Always follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Fridges and freezers must be cleaned regularly so that the foods stored in them do not get contaminated.

Clean outer surfaces, especially the door handles of fridges and freezers. This will reduce bacteria being transferred to clean hands while opening them.

Make sure the racks in the fridge are not rusting or

flaking as these may contaminate the food.

Defrost regularly. If it is not an automatic defrost model, ice build up will reduce the operation efficiency.

Check fridge seals regularly. Repair any that are loose or broken. This will prevent loss of temperature and spoilage of food.

If replacing fridges, it is a good policy to buy one with a good energy rating.



Food Safety Week 2007

The Food Safety Information Council (FSIC) organises Food Safety Week each year to let consumers know about simple things they can do to prevent food poisoning. The FSIC is a not-for-profit organisation, composed of Federal and State government agencies, industry and health professional associations. ACT Health is a member of the FSIC. The FSIC has been providing food safety messages to the public since 1997.

Food Safety Week was held from 12–19 November 2007. The theme was **Back to Basics** focusing on the main food safety messages – Clean, Cook, Chill and Separate. The Health Protection Service put up stalls at Jamison Plaza in Macquarie and Green Square in Kingston on 16 November 2007, promoting food safety messages such as safe handling of food, storing food at the right temperatures, hand washing and temperature zone for food.



Food Safety Programs – an update

Producers, harvesters, processors and distributors of raw oysters and other bivalves and producers of manufactured and fermented meats are required to have mandatory food safety programs in place. Public health officers from the Health Protection Service are working with the concerned food businesses on the implementation of this requirement.

For food services in which potentially hazardous food is served to vulnerable populations (e.g. hospitals, nursing homes, childcare centres) mandatory food safety programs will come into effect on **5 October 2008**.

A standard for **catering operations serving food to the general public**, (for example, spit roast caterers) is expected to be finalised sometime in 2008 and will

come into effect **two years after the gazettal of the standard**.

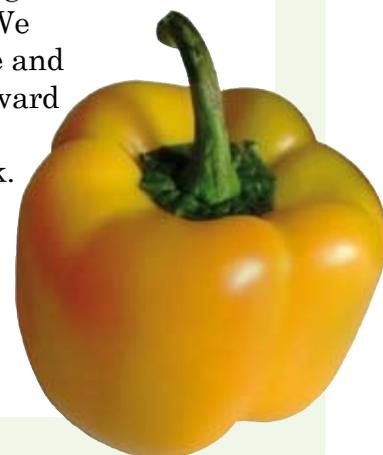
ACT Health website updated

Information about **Food Safety Programs** is now available on the ACT Health website. It also contains information about other food related services including registration of food businesses and food safety for businesses and the community.

The website can be accessed at www.health.act.gov.au, following these links Health Services >> Public Health >> Health Protection Service >> Food Safety.

NOTE Information in this newsletter is intended as a summary only and cannot cover all situations. Food businesses are required to comply with all the provisions of the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code and the Food Act, not just the contents of this newsletter.

Please contact the Health Protection Service on 6205 1700 for more information on any of the articles in this newsletter or questions regarding food safety. We welcome and look forward to your feedback.



ENGLISH	If you need interpreting help, telephone:
ARABIC	: إذا احتجت لمساعدة في الترجمة الشفوية ، إتصل برقم الهاتف :
CHINESE	如果你需要传译员的帮助，请打电话：
CROATIAN	Ako trebate pomoć tumača telefonirajte:
GREEK	Αν χρειάζεστε διερμηνέα τηλεφωνήστε στο
ITALIAN	Se avete bisogno di un interprete, telefonate al numero:
PERSIAN	: اگر به ترجمه شفاهی احتیاج دارید به این شماره تلفن کنید:
PORTUGUESE	Se você precisar da ajuda de um intérprete, telefone:
SERBIAN	Ако вам је потребна помоћ преводноца телефонирајте:
SPANISH	Si necesita la asistencia de un intérprete, llame al:
TURKISH	Tercümana ihtiyacınız varsa lütfen telefon ediniz:
VIETNAMESE	Nếu bạn cần một người thông-ngôn hãy gọi điện-thoại:

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