

# Food Handling and Food Safety in School Canteens

Food safety is especially important in schools as children are more prone to foodborne illnesses than adults. This information sheet provides general food safety information for school canteen operators.

## General requirements

As a registered food business, your canteen must have a food safety supervisor. This is someone who has completed mandatory food safety training and is able to supervise other people handling food. The canteen manager is usually the food safety supervisor. Food safety supervisor requirements are outlined on the [ACT Health website](#).

Food handlers must have knowledge and skills appropriate to the types of food they are handling. All people working in a canteen (including volunteers) should have a basic understanding of food hygiene and temperature control. Using food safety posters in the canteen is a good way to remind people of basic food safety requirements. It is strongly encouraged that all staff, including volunteers, do the I'M ALERT free online [food safety training](#) course.

## The importance of good hygiene

School canteen staff must consider food safety and hygiene at all times. All staff (including volunteers) need to follow these simple rules:

- do not prepare food if you are ill
- cover any wounds with a waterproof dressing (and glove if wound is on hand)
- before commencing/recommencing food handling, always wash hands thoroughly with warm soapy water and dry completely with single use paper towel (e.g. before handling food, between handling raw and cooked food, after touching raw meat, after using the toilet, etc.)
- tie hair back and remove or cover jewellery that may contaminate food (e.g. bracelets)
- wear clean protective clothing (e.g. aprons, hair nets, hats).

## Other food safety tips

Never defrost food on the bench top. Use a refrigerator for defrosting frozen foods.

Always sanitise or change chopping boards and utensils every time you prepare a new type of food (e.g. raw food, cooked food, fruit).

Protect food from contamination.

Keep food premises clean.

Never blow on food or into a bag that will contain food.

All canteens must have a food grade digital probe thermometer accurate to  $\pm 1^{\circ}\text{C}$  to check cold and hot temperatures.

Check food temperatures regularly. Cold food must be below  $5^{\circ}\text{C}$  and hot food must be above  $60^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

## 2 hour / 4 hour rule

The 2hr/4hr Rule tells you how long foods can remain safely outside of temperature control, like when you are preparing it on the bench and when you are displaying it for sale.

The range between  $5^{\circ}\text{C}$  and  $60^{\circ}\text{C}$  is known as the ‘temperature danger zone’, at which food poisoning bacteria can grow. It takes time for food poisoning bacteria to grow to unsafe levels. Applying the 2hr/4hr Rule ensures food remains safe to eat.

**Table 1: How to use the 2hr / 4hr Rule**

Time that food is between $5^{\circ}\text{C}$ and $60^{\circ}\text{C}$	Action
Total time less than 2 hours	Refrigerate or use immediately
Total time over 2 hours but less than 4 hours	Use immediately
Total time 4 hours or longer	Throw out

The ‘total time’ means adding up all the time the food and its ingredients have been out of temperature control, including during delivery, preparation, storage, display and transportation.

A canteen cannot just say that they use the 2 hour / 4 hour rule. There must be a documented records system in place to demonstrate food safety, including time and temperature records.

More about the [2hr/4hr rule](#) can be found on the ACT Health website and on the Food Standards Australia New Zealand [website](#).

## Vermin control

A school canteen must be kept free from pests and vermin. To do this you will need to close doors, use windows with screens, clean equipment regularly and dispose of garbage effectively.

## Food storage & display

Food must be stored appropriately. For example, raw meat should be kept in sealed containers at the bottom of the fridge so juices do not run onto other foods. Ready-to-eat foods should be covered and stored above vegetables and meat in the fridge.

Certain foods must be stored and displayed at the correct temperature:

- Cold foods must be kept at 5°C or below  
e.g. sandwiches, salads, raw meat, milk and dairy products
- Hot foods must be kept at 60°C or above.  
e.g. cooked rice, pasta, quiche, tofu, vegetable and meat dishes

All food served in the school canteen must be wrapped or covered when on display (e.g. sandwiches individually wrapped or in a covered display area).

Use tongs, spoons, bags or paper to serve unpackaged foods (e.g. use tongs to remove unwrapped sandwiches from display area).

## Food regulation and food safety information

For detailed [food safety information](#), including registration and food safety supervisors, visit the [ACT Health website](#). This site includes links to food safety resources such as Food Safety is your Business, a food safety guide.

## Contact us

For further information please contact the Health Protection Service on 5124 9700 or email [hps@act.gov.au](mailto:hps@act.gov.au).

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