

Safe Food Handling

Guidelines For Handling Food In The Home

Kitchen hygiene

1. EVERYONE who prepares food in the kitchen, including children and domestic staff, should be taught the basics of personal hygiene and hygienic food preparation.
2. Thorough hand washing and drying is the most important factor in preventing the spread of food poisoning micro-organisms.
3. Keep food for as short a time as possible and keep perishable food refrigerated. Observe the use by dates.
4. Always wash fruit and vegetables that are to be eaten raw in potable water including 'washed and ready to eat' salads.
5. Keep all kitchen utensils and chopping boards clean and wash thoroughly and frequently. Plastic boards are generally better than wooden boards, especially the laminated and chip board types. Chopping boards can be "sterilised" by soaking in a sodium hypochlorite bleach solution (diluted as recommended by the manufacturer) for 15 min. Wash with detergent and rinse in potable water afterwards. Soaking should be done in a plastic container and not in a metal basin since hypochlorite solutions corrode metals.
6. Always handle and store cooked food separately from raw food. Wash your hands before moving from raw to cooked foods.
7. Whenever appropriate, keep food covered to prevent contamination. Remember that flies vomit onto food to pre-digest it before starting to feed.
8. Never serve food that looks or smells peculiar, but remember that food implicated in food poisoning outbreaks often look and taste quite normal.

Cold storage: the fridge and freezer

1. Deep freezing does not kill micro-organisms - they are just held in a state of 'suspended animation' although they do not multiply in frozen food. Uncooked frozen meat and thawed meat should always be treated as contaminated.
2. Cool cooked foods for cold storage as quickly as possible. Cover the food after it is cooked. When it is no longer steaming and the container is just cool enough to pick up with bare hands, transfer it to the fridge. Remember that if the food is too hot when it is placed in the fridge, the internal temperature of the fridge will rise because of the warming effect of the hot food. This can have detrimental effects on other food in the fridge.
3. If possible, use a thermometer in the fridge to help maintain the correct temperature of approximately 4°C. Most fridges in South Africa are not cold enough. Remember that even at this low temperature, some types of bacteria can still multiply and most will survive, so keep foods for as short a time as possible.
4. Store raw food at the bottom of the fridge and cooked foods closer to the top to help avoid the risk of cross contamination caused, for example, by blood from raw meat dripping onto items stored below it.
5. If food is thawed in the refrigerator, make sure it is completely defrosted before cooking. Food that is not completely thawed before cooking, will not reach a high enough internal temperature during the cooking process to destroy harmful micro-organisms. This is particularly important in the case of poultry because many cases of food borne disease are associated with undercooked poultry.
6. If food is thawed out at room temperature (generally not a good idea in South Africa's hot

climate), remember to refrigerate it or cook it immediately after thawing. Leaving thawed food at room temperature creates ideal conditions for the growth of micro-organisms.

Cooking and re-heating food

1. Keep the kitchen free of pests and keep utensils, equipment and surfaces clean.
2. Try as far as possible to prepare just enough food for a single meal to avoid having left-overs. (Bulk cooking for the freezer is a planned activity and a different scenario)
3. Do not prepare food too far in advance of serving
4. Never reheat food more than once
5. Reheat food to boiling point (especially foods like gravy and soups). Don't just warm it up to save time because this won't destroy micro-organisms.
6. Reheating food in a microwave is generally regarded as safe. Stir liquid foods (such as soup) during the reheating for a more even distribution of heat. Remember to follow the recommended standing times to allow the food to attain an even temperature before eating.
7. Micro waving is generally not to be recommended for cooking raw meat and poultry because of the uneven heat distribution pattern (cold spots) in a microwave oven.
8. Avoid eating undercooked poultry and rare meat. Poultry in particular carries high numbers of micro-organisms, including types that are capable of causing food poisoning, if the poultry meat is not handled and cooked properly.
9. Try to achieve a high enough internal temperature when cooking large joints and birds. Cook poultry stuffing separately, leaving the cavity of the bird empty.
10. Avoid eating lightly cooked eggs and raw eggs because food poisoning bacteria may sometimes be found in shell eggs. Avoid recipes that call for raw or lightly cooked egg whites and/or yolk eggs, such as chocolate mouse, custards, and sauces and home made mayonnaise.

Braaing

1. It is as important to maintain the same standards of good hygiene when braaing as it is when preparing food in the kitchen. Personal hygiene is often more difficult when food is prepared away from home because of lack of ablution facilities. Nevertheless, good hygiene standards must be applied to ensure the safety of the food. With braaing, the main problem arises with cross contamination from raw meat to cooked meat and other prepared foods, and lack of personal hygiene of the person preparing the food.
2. Meat for braaing should be placed in a drip free container and kept well away from the cooked meat coming off the braai.
3. Cooked meat must NEVER be put back into the dish that held the raw meat. Cooked meat must go into a clean separate container to prevent it from becoming contaminated. Similarly, two sets of tongs should be available, one for the raw food and one for the cooked food. (Tongs can be sterilised by plunging them into the braai coals)
4. Prepared food, such as salads, should be brought from the fridge or cooler box to the table when the meat is ready for eating. All food should be kept covered against flies. Never leave prepared food lying around in the warm sun.
5. Discard any surplus food that cannot immediately be refrigerated after the meal.

Additionally, have a look

at <http://www.ifst.org/about-formal-responses/review-integrity-and-assurance-food-supply-networks-%E2%80%93-call-evidence-questions>

Reviewed for FACS by PJo (2016)