

Good Hygiene Practices for Large Functions

Food poisoning is a miserable and potentially dangerous experience. It is your responsibility to ensure that your food does not make customers ill.

At Christmas time, large bookings, parties and celebrations can put extra strain on catering functions. The following advice reflects some of the most common food hygiene problems that cause food poisoning. We hope the advice is useful and we wish you a happy and profitable Christmas!

What are the most common faults causing food poisoning?

STORAGE



Large functions mean large quantities of cooked and uncooked food competing for limited amounts of fridge and freezer space

Inappropriate storage is one of the most common faults reported as contributing to food poisoning outbreaks.

Don't take chances. Before you take on the task of catering for larger numbers, make sure you've got the fridge and freezer capacity needed to keep food cool and safe.

Avoid cross contamination. Keep cooked and uncooked food separate. Don't clutter the fridge with beer, wines, soft drinks, vegetables etc. Whilst these might taste better cold, they don't need to be refrigerated from the point of view of food safety. Keep them in separate ice buckets or cool boxes to maximise fridge space for high-risk foods.

The beer cellar should not be used to chill high-risk foods. The cellar is only suitable for the storage of vegetables if they are kept in lidded containers.

COOKING

Cooking food thoroughly - which means the temperature at the centre reaches **70°C for at least 2 minutes** - is the key to killing food poisoning bacteria. Whole poultry or large joints need special care.

Meat and poultry must be fully thawed before cooking. Food must only be thawed in the refrigerator or microwave. Plan well ahead to allow for defrost times.

Domestic ovens may not have the capacity to handle the amounts of food needed for large functions.

The only way to test the centre temperature of foods accurately is with a temperature probe. If it is not hot enough, keep cooking!

Don't be tempted to cut cooking times just because people are waiting to eat!

TEMPERATURE CONTROL

It is important to keep high-risk food in the fridge. A busy kitchen can often reach 40°C, so food left out at these temperatures will easily grow bacteria.

The food in the fridge should remain below **8°C** and preferably between **0°C and 5°C**. Temperatures should be regularly checked with a probe thermometer.

Don't overload the fridge. The efficiency of the fridge will suffer if cooling air cannot circulate freely.





Keep the fridge door shut as much as possible. Leaving the door open raises the temperature.

Prepare foods that need to be kept in the fridge last. Don't leave it standing at room temperature.

Cooked foods that need to be chilled should **be cooled as quickly as possible**. Aim to cool foods to below 8°C **within 90 minutes**. Where practical, reduce cooling times by limiting sizes of joints, turkeys, portions, etc. Iced water, running cold water and ice packs can all be used to help cool foods quicker.

If food is being transported to a venue then keeping foods hot or cold can be a problem. Use cool boxes and hot cabinets. Check that the venue has adequate facilities and capacity to cope with the volume of food expected.

Consider hiring extra fridges if you do not have enough refrigerated storage.

CROSS CONTAMINATION

Cross contamination (that is, bacteria spreading from raw foods, staff, utensils, etc on to ready to eat food) plays an important role in food poisoning.

Cooking for large numbers can mean more people in the kitchen at the same time. There are likely to be larger quantities of food, raw or cooked. Larger numbers of pots, pans, plates and utensils being used. More washing up. Greater problems keeping worktops clean.

There are certain basic rules which will help to reduce the risk of cross contamination.

Prepare raw and cooked food separately. Don't use the same equipment, boards, utensils etc for raw meat and ready to eat foods. Common work equipment should be disinfected between work with raw and cooked foods.

Don't use raw eggs in any dishes. There is a risk of Salmonella food poisoning. Use pasteurised egg instead

Work surfaces and other food contact areas require frequent cleaning and disinfection. Use a suitable sanitiser or disinfectant. Make sure you have enough in stock for busy periods.

Keep your hands clean at all times. Wash them with warm soapy water before work, after touching raw food and after visiting the toilet. Damp hands spread 1000 times more bacteria than dry hands so dry thoroughly.

Change dishcloths regularly. Disposable cloths are the best choice.

Don't employ staff who are suffering from sickness, diarrhoea or heavy colds. When suffering from these illnesses you put food safety at risk.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Try the Food Safety Team's website at www.westwiltshire.gov.uk/food-hygiene.htm or contact us on 01225 776655 ext 594 or email us at environmentalhealth@westwiltshire.gov.uk

The Food Standards Agency website at www.food.gov.uk/ is a good source of food, nutrition and food safety related information.

