

RAL RecSoc Food Hygiene Guidance

This document contains information and guidelines for good food hygiene. It is a legal requirement for the RecSoc, and its members that are providing food or catering for others, to comply with all enforced food hygiene regulations. This includes displaying food allergy information.

The RecSoc strongly recommends that you and your catering team understand and follow the food hygiene guidance specified in this document when providing catering for private functions.

Why is Food Hygiene Important?

Good food hygiene is essential to make sure that the food you serve is safe to eat. It helps prevent food poisoning.

The four main things to remember for good food hygiene are the 4Cs:

1. Cleaning
2. Cooking
3. Chilling
4. Cross-contamination

Personal hygiene

To keep food safe, it is essential for you, and anyone else who is preparing or handling food for human consumption, to have high standards of personal hygiene.

Personal hygiene covers:

- Handwashing
- Clothing
- Fitness for work
- Training

Storing Food Safely

It is very important to store food properly to keep it safe, to protect it from harmful bacteria, chemicals and objects falling into food. You'll need to store different types of food by storing in:

- Containers you keep in cupboards or on shelves
- A fridge
- A freezer
- A chilled cool box

Transporting food safely

When you transport food to the RecSoc, you must prevent it from becoming contaminated, for example with dirt or bacteria.

It is especially important to make sure that:

- Food is transported in packaging or containers that protect it from contamination
- Chilled and frozen foods are kept at the right temperature (use cool bags and boxes)
- Raw and ready-to-eat foods are kept apart

The RecSoc can provide some catering equipment in the form of cleaning/sanitising products, kitchenware, food preparation utensils, cookware and barbeque utensils, serving dishes, aprons, food gloves, etc.

The catering equipment we provide should be clean but we cannot guarantee it will be 'ready to use'. It is your responsibility to ensure that any catering equipment that you use for food preparation, storage, cooking or serving, be it your own or provided by the RecSoc, is thoroughly cleaned and/or sanitised before you use it.

It is also your responsibility to clean any RecSoc provided catering equipment that you use after you have finished using it, unless prior alternative arrangements have been agreed.

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Cleaning

Effective cleaning removes bacteria on hands, equipment and surfaces. This helps to stop harmful bacteria and viruses from spreading onto food.

Hand washing

You should wash your hands before you prepare, cook or eat food. Where possible you should wash your hands with warm soapy water. If you're in a situation where it's not possible to wash your hands, for example at a picnic, you can use hand-sanitising wipes or gels to disinfect them before handling food.

Bacteria and viruses

You are removing harmful bacteria by cleaning with warm, soapy water or by using disinfectant cleaning products. You should regularly clean your:

- Hands
- Work surfaces
- Chopping boards
- Knives

You are not actually killing the bacteria when you wash in this way. To kill the bacteria you need to wash the surfaces at temperatures above 70°C and maintain that temperature for some time. This temperature is too hot for your hands without the risk of serious scalding.

However, by washing with warm, soapy water, the lather and physical motion will detach the bacteria from the surface. The bacteria will be washed down the drain and will be removed from the waste water by the water treatment system.

While it is possible to clean with cold water, warm water will ensure that the soap or detergent lathers up properly. It is important that the soap lathers so it can be more effective at removing the bacteria.

Cleaning kitchen items

Dish cloths

Wash or change dish cloths, tea towels, sponges and oven gloves regularly. It's important to let them dry before you use them again. This is because dirty, damp cloths allow bacteria to breed.

Utensils and serving dishes

Take care to keep all utensils and dishes clean before preparing food. This is to avoid cross-contamination. You should use different utensils, plates and chopping boards when preparing ready-to-eat foods and raw foods that require cooking. Remember to wash them thoroughly between tasks to avoid the spread of harmful bacteria.

Cleaning food

Raw meat

You should not wash raw meat. Washing meat under a tap can splash bacteria onto your hands, clothes, utensils and worktops.

Washing raw meat, such as chicken, can spread harmful bacteria like campylobacter. Thorough cooking will kill any bacteria present.

Fruit and vegetables

Remember to wash fruit and vegetables with water before you eat them. This is to make sure that they are clean and harmful bacteria can be removed from the outside. You should wash them under a running tap, or in a bowl of fresh water, making sure to rub their skin under the water. You can start with the least soiled items first and give each of them a final rinse.

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Peeling vegetables can also remove more bacteria, so this is an additional precaution you can take when intending to eat root vegetables raw.

Cleaning products

A wide range of products are available for cleaning and disinfection. You should read the manufacturer's instructions carefully to ensure that the product is suitable for food surfaces and that you are using it correctly.

To effectively kill any harmful bacteria properly, you should make sure you:

- Leave the cleaning product on the surface for the time specified in the instructions
- Read the manufacturer's guidance to check if it needs to be diluted before use

Cleaning products will be classed as detergents, disinfectants or sanitisers.

Detergents

Detergents clean the surface and remove grease, but they do not kill bacteria.

Disinfectants

Disinfectants kill bacteria. They should be used on a visibly clean surface. They do not work effectively if the surface is covered in grease or visible dirt. It is important that you follow the specified contact times for the products to be effective.

Sanitisers

Sanitisers can be used to clean and disinfect as part of a two-stage approach. First use the sanitiser to clean the surface. This will remove any:

- Dirt
- Food
- Grease

You should then re-apply the sanitiser to the visibly clean surface and leave for the required time. This will disinfect the surface.

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Cooking

Thorough cooking kills harmful bacteria in food. Undercooked food could cause food poisoning.

Cooking meat

Most types of meat should be thoroughly cooked as there could be harmful bacteria in the middle. You should thoroughly cook the following types of meat:

- Poultry, for example chicken or turkey
- Duck and other fowl
- Pork
- Rolled joints
- Products made from minced meat, such as burgers, sausages and kebabs
- Kidneys, liver and other types of offal

Before you serve them, check that:

- They are steaming hot all the way through
- Any juices run clear
- There's no pink or rare meat inside

With whole cuts of beef and lamb such as steaks, cutlets and roasting joints (not rolled joints), it is usually only the surface which can be contaminated with food poisoning bacteria. Make sure the meat surface is properly cooked and sealed to kill any bacteria, even if the middle of the meat is still pink.

Cooking temperatures

Standard advice is to cook food until it has reached a core temperature of 70°C for 2 minutes. The other time and temperature combinations are:

- 60°C for 45 minutes
- 65°C for 10 minutes
- 70°C for 2 minutes
- 75°C for 30 seconds
- 80°C for 6 seconds

Cooking food at the right temperature and for the correct length of time will ensure that any harmful bacteria are killed.

You can check the temperature of a food, using a clean probe. Insert the probe so that the tip is in the centre of the food or the thickest part.

Keeping food hot

Hot food when held must be kept at 63°C or above. You can keep it below 63°C for up to two hours. If it has not been used within two hours, you should either:

- Cool the food as quickly as possible to a temperature of 8°C or below
- Throw it away

Reheating food

It is very important to reheat food properly to kill harmful bacteria that may have grown since the food was cooked.

Reheating means cooking again, not just warming up. Always reheat food until it is steaming hot all the way through. You can only reheat your food once.

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Barbecuing – the risks

The main risk factors to your health when using a barbecue are:

- Undercooked meat
- Spreading germs from raw meat onto food that's ready to eat

This is because raw or undercooked meat can contain germs that cause food poisoning.

Keeping safe

The safest option is to pre-cook your food indoors then put the cooked food on the outdoor barbecue for a short time for flavour. Refer to the Chilling section for guidance on storing pre-cooked food.

Cooking meat on a barbecue

When you're cooking meat on a barbecue, such as chicken, pork, steak, burgers or sausages, make sure:

- The barbecue is preheated before starting to cook
- If using coals/briquettes, they are glowing red with a powdery grey surface before you start cooking, as this means that they're hot enough
- Frozen meat is properly thawed before you cook it
- You turn the meat regularly and move it around the barbecue to cook it evenly

Remember that meat is safe to eat only when:

- It is piping hot in the centre
- There is no pink meat visible
- Any juices are clear

Handling raw meat

Germs from raw meat can move easily onto your hands and then onto anything else you touch, including food that is cooked and ready to eat. This can happen if raw meat touches anything, including cooking utensils which then come into contact with other food.

Some simple steps that will help prevent the spread of germs from raw meat are:

- Wash your hands after every time you touch raw meat
- Use separate utensils (plates, tongs, containers) for cooked and raw meat
- Never put cooked food on a plate or surface that has had raw meat on it
- Keep raw meat in a sealed container away from foods that are ready to eat, such as salads and bread
- Don't put raw meat next to cooked or partly-cooked meat on the barbecue
- Don't put sauce or marinade on cooked food if it has already been used with raw meat

Keep food cool

Make sure you keep the following foods cool to help prevent food poisoning:

- Salads
- Dips
- Dairy products such as milk, cream and yoghurt
- Desserts and cream cakes
- Sandwiches
- Ham and other cooked meats
- Cooked rice, including rice salads

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Burgers

Food safety advice when preparing and cooking burgers

Preparing burgers

When cooking on the barbecue, always cook burgers thoroughly,. Burgers served rare or undercooked may contain harmful bacteria that could cause food poisoning.

Before serving your burgers, always check that:

- They're steaming hot all the way through
- When you cut into the centre, none of the meat is pink and any juices run clear

It's also important to remember to avoid cross-contamination by:

- Covering raw meat and keeping it separate from ready-to-eat food
- Using a dish that will prevent spillages
- Storing raw meat on the bottom shelf of your fridge
- Using different utensils, plates and chopping boards for raw and cooked food or washing them thoroughly between tasks
- Washing your hands after touching raw meat and before you handle ready-to-eat food

Why a burger isn't like a steak

Harmful bacteria can be carried on the surface of whole cuts of meat. When a rare steak is seared these bacteria are killed, making the steak safe to eat.

When meat is minced to produce burgers, any harmful bacteria from the surface of the raw meat spread throughout the burger. Unless the burger is cooked right through, these bacteria can remain alive on the inside. This applies to all burgers, including burgers made from good quality or expensive meat.

That's why a burger needs to be served well done, while a steak can be served rare.

How bacteria get onto meat

While it is being produced, meat can become contaminated with bacteria, including harmful ones like E. coli O157 and salmonella. The main source of these bacteria is the intestines of the animal. When animals are slaughtered, there is potential for E. coli O157 and other bacteria from the animal's gut to contaminate the surface of the meat.

Even the very best quality meat carries bacteria

Contamination can happen right at the start of the process, when animals are slaughtered. There is no way of knowing which animals are carrying harmful bacteria in their gut.

The quality of the meat you buy doesn't make any difference to the potential risk of contamination.

Eating rare burgers

Some restaurants are able to put in place strict controls over the way their burgers are produced and cooked. These controls mean that the risk from burgers that are pink in the middle is significantly reduced.

To minimise the risk of food poisoning the RecSoc strongly advises only serving burgers that are thoroughly cooked.

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Chilling

Chilling food properly helps to stop harmful bacteria from growing. Some foods need to be kept chilled to keep them safe, for example:

- Food with a use-by date
- Cooked dishes
- Other ready-to-eat food such as prepared salads and desserts

It is very important not to leave these types of food standing around at room temperature. Make sure that you:

- Follow storage instructions
- Put food that needs to be chilled in the fridge straight away
- Cool cooked food as quickly as possible and then put it in the fridge
- Keep chilled food out of the fridge for the shortest time possible during preparation
- Check regularly that your fridge and display units are cold enough

When you are serving or displaying cold foods, they can be kept outside the fridge for up to four hours. If any food is left after this time, you should either:

- Throw it away
- Put it back into the fridge

Fridge temperature

Cold food must be kept at 8°C or below. This is a legal requirement in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The RecSoc fridge is set at less than 5°C to make sure that food is kept cold enough. You should check that the fridge is cold enough if you are storing food in it.

Freezing

It is important to take care when freezing food and to handle frozen food safely:

- Put frozen food in the freezer as soon as it is delivered
- If you are freezing fresh food, freeze it as soon as it has been delivered or prepared divide food into smaller portions and put it in containers or freezer bags before freezing
- If you freeze food that has a 'use-by' date to use later, make sure you freeze it before the use-by date is past - clearly note the date you are freezing it. You will also need to change the 'use-by' date to a 'best before' date

Defrosting

Ideally, you should defrost food in the fridge. Putting food in the fridge will keep it at a safe temperature while it is defrosting.

If you cannot defrost food in the fridge, you could put it in a container and then place it under cold running water. Raw meat and poultry, including large joints and whole birds, should not be defrosted under cold running water unless they are in a sealed container.

You could also defrost food in the microwave on the 'defrost' setting.

Food should be thoroughly defrosted before cooking unless the manufacturer's instructions tell you to cook from frozen.

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Cross-contamination

Cross-contamination is when bacteria is spread between food, surfaces or equipment and is one of the most common causes of food poisoning.

Bacterial cross-contamination is most likely to happen when raw food touches or drips onto ready-to-eat food, equipment, utensils or surfaces. For example, if raw meat drips onto a cake in the fridge, bacteria will spread from the meat to the cake.

Cross-contamination can also happen when bacteria is transferred in ways that are harder to see. For example, via reusable shopping bags, or in the drips and splashes produced when meat is washed which can contaminate other surfaces.

Equipment

It can also happen when you use the same equipment for raw and ready-to-eat food. For example, if you cut raw chicken on a chopping board, bacteria will spread from the chicken to the board and knife. If you then use the same board and knife (without washing and disinfecting them thoroughly) to chop a cucumber, the bacteria will spread from the board and knife to the cucumber.

Hands

Hands can also spread bacteria. If you do not wash your hands thoroughly after touching raw food, you can spread bacteria to the other things you touch.

Avoiding cross-contamination

You can avoid cross-contamination by:

Preparing food hygienically

- Clean and disinfect work surfaces, chopping boards and equipment thoroughly before you start preparing food
- Use different utensils, plates and chopping boards for raw and cooked food
- Wash utensils, plates and chopping boards for raw and cooked food thoroughly between tasks
- Make sure you do not wash raw meat
- Wash your hands after touching raw food and before you handle ready-to-eat food

Storing food effectively

- Cover raw food, including meat, and keep it separate from ready-to-eat food
- Use any dish that has a lip to prevent spillages
- Store covered raw meat, poultry, fish and shellfish on the bottom shelf of your fridge

Using shopping bags safely

- If using shopping bags to carry food produce pack raw and ready-to-eat food separately
- Pack cleaning products and other household items separately from food
- Check your bags for spillages after use. If there has been visible spillage, soiling or damage, the bag should be replaced
- Consider using cotton/fabric bags as they can be put in the washing machine and cleaned

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Personal hygiene

To keep food safe, you and your catering team must maintain a high level of personal hygiene.

You/they must wear clothing that is:

- Suitable
- Clean
- Protective

When preparing or handling food you/they should:

- Keep hair tied back and wear a suitable head covering, e.g. hat or hair net
- Not wear watches or jewellery (except a wedding band)
- Not touch their face and hair, smoke, spit, sneeze, eat or chew gum

Handwashing

Effective handwashing is extremely important to help prevent harmful bacteria from spreading from peoples' hands. All people that work with food must wash their hands:

- Before preparing food
- After touching raw food
- After handling food waste or emptying a bin
- After cleaning
- After blowing their nose
- After touching phones, light switches, door handles, etc.

You and your catering team should dry their hands on a disposable towel. This is because harmful bacteria can spread on wet or damp hands. Use a disposable towel to turn off the tap.

Fitness for work

You must not allow anyone to handle food or enter a food handling area if they:

- Are suffering from or carrying a disease likely to be transmitted through food
- Have infected wounds, skin infections or sores
- Have diarrhoea

If any of these apply to a member of your team, they must tell you about it immediately.

Anyone with diarrhoea or vomiting should not prepare, cook or handle food until they have had no symptoms for 48 hours.

Training

By law, food business operators must ensure that food handlers receive the appropriate supervision and training in food hygiene, which is in-line with the area they work in and will enable them to handle food in the safest way. In the UK, food handlers don't have to hold a food hygiene certificate to prepare or sell food.

RecSoc members who regularly use the barbecue or assist with catering for private functions will undertake online Food Hygiene and Safety training or on-the-job training from a member with Food Hygiene and Safety certification or relevant prior experience.

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Storing food safely

Depending on the type of food, you'll need to store it in the fridge, freezer or in suitable containers. When storing food, it's important to keep food safe so that's it still safe to eat or cook.

Storing food in the fridge

Some food needs to be kept in the fridge to help stop bacteria from growing on it, such as food with a 'use by' date, cooked food and ready-to-eat food such as desserts and cooked meats.

Make sure your fridge is cold enough

You need to make sure the fridge is cold enough or food poisoning bacteria will still be able to grow. The fridge should be between 0°C and 5°C.

To store food safely in the fridge:

- Keep the fridge door closed as much as possible
- Wait for food to cool down before you put it in the fridge
- Turn the temperature down to help keep it cold enough if the fridge is full

Keeping food in the fridge

To help stop bacteria from growing:

- When the label says 'keep refrigerated', make sure you do keep the food in the fridge - if the food isn't labelled with any storage instructions and it's a type of food that goes off quickly, you should put it in the fridge and eat it within two days
- Some jars and bottles need to be kept in the fridge once they've been opened - check the label and follow storage instructions
- When you're preparing food, keep it out of the fridge for the shortest time possible, especially when the weather or the room is warm
- If you have made some food (such as a sandwich or a cold dish) and you're not going to eat it straight away, keep it in the fridge until you're ready to eat it
- If you're having a party or making a buffet, leave the food in the fridge until people are ready to eat - you shouldn't leave food out of the fridge for more than four hours
- Cool leftovers as quickly as possible (ideally within one to two hours) and then store them in the fridge - eat any leftovers within two days, except for cooked rice, which you should eat within one day to help avoid food poisoning

Storing meat

It's important to store meat safely to stop bacteria from spreading and to avoid food poisoning. You should:

- Store raw meat and poultry in clean, sealed containers on the bottom shelf of the fridge, so they can't touch or drip onto other food
- Follow any storage instructions on the label and don't eat meat after its 'use by' date
- When you have cooked meat and you're not going to eat it straight away, cool it as quickly as possible and then put it in the fridge or freezer
- Keep cooked meat separate from raw meat

Keeping food in the freezer

You can keep food safely in the freezer for years as long as it stays frozen the whole time. But the taste and texture of food changes if it's frozen for too long, so you might well find that it's not very nice to eat.

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You can check any instructions on food labels or in your freezer's handbook (if you don't have this anymore, you might be able to find it online) to see how long food should be frozen.

It's safe to freeze most raw or cooked foods providing you:

- Freeze it before the 'use by' date
- Follow any freezing or thawing instructions on the label
- Thaw it in the fridge so that it doesn't get too warm, or, if you plan on cooking it as soon as it's defrosted, you could defrost it in a microwave
- Try to use it within one to two days after it's been defrosted – it will go off in the same way as if it were fresh
- Cook food until it's steaming hot all the way through

When frozen meat and fish (and some other foods) thaw, lots of liquid can come out of them. If you're defrosting raw meat or fish, this liquid will spread bacteria to any food, plates or surfaces that it touches. Keep the meat and fish in a sealed container at the bottom of the fridge, so that it can't touch or drip onto other foods.

Always clean plates, utensils, surfaces and hands thoroughly, after they have touched raw or thawing meat, to stop bacteria from spreading.

If you defrost raw meat or fish and then cook it thoroughly, you can freeze it again, but remember never reheat foods more than once.

Storing dry food in containers

Many types of food don't need to be kept in the fridge to keep them safe to eat, for example dry foods such as rice, pasta and flour, many types of drinks, tinned foods, and unopened jars. But it's still important to take care how you store them.

To store dry food safely:

- Keep food in sealed bags or containers - this helps keep food fresh and stops anything falling into the food by accident
- Don't store food or drinks near cleaning products or other chemicals
- Don't use old food containers to store household chemicals, and don't store food in containers that have been used for other purposes
- Only reuse undamaged plastic water bottles that you can clean
- Don't store food on the floor, because this can encourage mice, ants and other pests
- Keep the storage area dry and not too warm

Tin cans

When you open a can of food and you're not going to use all the food straight away, empty the food into a bowl, or another container, and put it in the fridge.

Don't store food in an opened tin can, or re-use empty cans to cook or store food. This is because when a can has been opened and the food is open to the air, the tin from the can might transfer more quickly to the can's contents.

This advice doesn't apply to foods sold in cans that have resealable lids, such as golden syrup and cocoa, because these types of food don't react with the can.

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Covering food with cling film

Cling film is useful for protecting food but, like many things, it needs to be used correctly.

Not every type of cling film is suitable for using with all foods. Check the description on the box to see what foods it can be used with.

There are three main points to remember when using cling film:

- Don't use cling film if it could melt into the food,
- You can use cling film in the microwave (in line with the manufacturer's instructions), but make sure the cling film doesn't touch the food
- Cling film should only touch high-fat foods, such as some types of cheese, raw meats with a layer of fat, fried meats, pies and pastries, and cakes with butter icing or chocolate coatings, when the description on the box says the cling film is suitable

Covering food with kitchen foil

Kitchen foil, which is made from aluminium, can be useful for wrapping and covering foods. But it's best not to use foil or containers made from aluminium to store foods that are highly acidic, such as:

- Tomatoes
- Rhubarb
- Cabbage
- Soft fruit

Aluminium can affect the taste of these foods.

This guidance and information in this document has been collated from the following sources:

Training Express – Basic Food Hygiene Rules

[Basic Food Hygiene Rules to Consider When Preparing Food – \(trainingexpress.org.uk\)](https://www.trainingexpress.org.uk)

Food Standards Agency

[Food hygiene for your business | Food Standards Agency](#)

[Cleaning | Food Standards Agency](#)

[Cleaning effectively in your business | Food Standards Agency](#)

[Cooking your food | Food Standards Agency](#)

[Cooking safely in your business | Food Standards Agency](#)

[Chilling | Food Standards Agency](#)

[Chilling food correctly in your business | Food Standards Agency](#)

[Avoiding cross-contamination | Food Standards Agency](#)

[Avoiding cross-contamination in your food business | Food Standards Agency](#)

[Personal hygiene | Food Standards Agency](#)

[Home food fact checker | Food Standards Agency](#)

[SAFER FOOD BETTER BUSINESS FOR CATERERS](#)

NI Direct

[Food safety - barbecuing | nidirect](#)

[Storing food safely | nidirect](#)