

## Catering from home safely

Are you planning to cater from home for family or friends, perhaps for a wedding or birthday, or for a group meeting? If so, then you might find this information helpful. You might be planning to prepare the food at home and then take it somewhere else to be eaten, such as a community centre, social club or village hall. **As the person preparing or handling the food, it is your responsibility to make sure your food does not make the guests ill.** Food poisoning is a miserable and potentially dangerous experience.

You will need to take extra care if any young children, pregnant women, older people or anyone who is ill will be coming to the function. This is because if anyone in these vulnerable groups gets food poisoning, they are more likely to become seriously ill.

### Keeping food safe

A very wide range of foods can cause food poisoning if not handled properly. Raw poultry, and occasionally raw eggs, may contain food poisoning bacteria. Both are associated with food poisoning outbreaks. Meat and meat products, and shellfish have also been identified as the cause of illness. Sauces and desserts that contain raw eggs, such as mousses and homemade ice creams, may cause problems too. Likewise, you need to be careful with raw salads and vegetables that will be eaten raw. Many foods can be a source of food poisoning bacteria - proper precautions must be taken in preparing them.

### Big functions, big responsibilities

Catering from home for large functions means that you might be preparing food for more people than usual, cooking foods you **don't** cook very often, and storing large amounts of food. All of these have safety implications. You might find it helpful to think about these issues:

- Large functions mean large quantities of food. You must make sure there is enough fridge and freezer space to cope. Is your domestic oven large enough for the job you're asking it to do?
- How will you cope with the extra people in the kitchen, the extra clutter, more dirty dishes, plates, utensils and messier worktops? You will need to ensure that your helpers also understand the need for good hygiene practice.
- Can you get the food to the function room safely? And when you've got it there, will you have the necessary facilities for safe refrigerated storage and proper reheating?

**Remember - food poisoning is a miserable and potentially dangerous experience. You are responsible for ensuring the safety of the guests if you are preparing food for them.**

## Checklist

Catering from home for large functions is not something to be taken on lightly. Large amounts of food need to be prepared in advance and stored appropriately. If this is not done properly the risk of food poisoning is increased. You need to plan ahead and think carefully about food safety. If you're thinking of catering for larger numbers than usual, here are some key **dos** and **don'ts**.

### Plan carefully

- **don't** make food too far in advance.
- **don't** leave food standing around for several hours in a warm room before it is eaten.
- **DO** make sure you've got enough fridge and freezer space. Get the help of friends and neighbours to make sure you have the capacity you need.
- **DO** take special care with vulnerable groups.

### Proper temperature control is essential

- **DO** make sure that perishable food is kept chilled. Perishable food includes, for example, cold meats, quiches and desserts. Keep the most perishable foods in the coldest part of the fridge; but always store raw food below ready-to-eat food, in case there are any drips, and keep it in a leak-proof container.
- **DO** make sure that food is cooked thoroughly. Large meat joints and whole poultry need special care to make sure the centre is well cooked. If you're reheating food, **don't** do it more than once - and always heat it until piping hot all the way through.
- **DO** keep hot food hot and cold food cold.

### Avoid contaminating prepared food

- **don't** let raw foods, such as meat and poultry, or unwashed fruit, vegetables and salads, come into contact with food that is ready to eat.
- **DO** wash your hands thoroughly before touching foods and after handling raw foods such as meat and poultry.

### Take care with eggs

- **don't** use raw eggs in uncooked or lightly cooked foods such as home-made mayonnaise, mousse, cake icing and hollandaise sauce. Use pasteurised egg instead.

If you're thinking of catering for a large function from your own home, the best advice is: **Make sure you can do it safely.**

### For further information contact:

Food and Pest Control Team, Environmental Health and Trading Standards,  
Civic Centre, Neath, SA11 3QZ

**Telephone:** 01639 685678 **Email:** [ehd@npt.gov.uk](mailto:ehd@npt.gov.uk)