



Barbecue food safety information from SOS Medicos 24HS

Cases of food poisoning double over the summer months, so make sure you know the simple steps that can help to keep food safe.

Food poisoning is usually mild, and most people get better within a week. But sometimes it can be more severe, even deadly, so it's important to take the risks seriously. Children, older people and those with weakened immune systems are particularly vulnerable to food poisoning.

The safest option is to cook food indoors using your oven, you can then put the cooked food outside on the barbecue for flavour. This can be an easier option if you're cooking for a lot of people at the same time.

But if you prefer to cook on the barbecue, the two main risk factors 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, such as salmonella, E.coli and campylobacter. However, it's easy to kill these germs by cooking meat until it is piping hot throughout.

Germs from raw meat can move easily onto your hands, and then onto anything else you touch, such as food that is cooked and ready to eat.

Cooking meat on a barbecue

When you're cooking any kind of meat on a barbecue, such as poultry (chicken or turkey), pork, steak, burgers or sausages, make sure:

- The coals 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.

Some meat, such as steaks and joints of beef or lamb, can be served rare (not cooked in the middle) as long as the outside has been properly cooked. This will kill any bacteria that might be on the outside of the meat. However, food made from minced meat, for example sausages and burgers, must be cooked thoroughly all the way through.

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 is called cross-contamination.

Cross-contamination can happen if raw meat touches anything (including plates, cutlery, tongs and chopping boards) that then comes into contact with other food.

Some easy steps to help prevent cross-contamination 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 buns.
- 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.

Keeping food cool

It's also important to keep some foods cool to prevent food-poisoning germs multiplying.

Make sure you keep the following foods cool:

- salads
- dips
- milk, cream, yoghurt
- desserts and cream cakes
- sandwiches
- ham and other cooked meats
- cooked rice, including rice salads

Don't leave food out of the fridge for more than a couple of hours, and don't leave food in the sun.

Fire safety

Make sure your barbecue is steady on a level surface, away from plants and trees.

The Fire Service advises covering the bottom of your barbecue with coal to a depth of no more than 5cm (2in). Use only recognised firelighters or starter fuel, and then only on cold coals.

Never use petrol on a barbecue.

Food hygiene can help you avoid food poisoning, salmonella and other bacterial infections.

How to prepare and cook food correctly to reduce the risk of food poisoning

Studies show that, contrary to popular belief, the kitchen contains the most germs in the home.

One study found that the kitchen sink contains 100,000 times more germs than the bathroom.

Germs such as E. coli, campylobacter and salmonella enter the kitchen on our hands, raw food and pets. They can rapidly spread if you're not careful.

If food isn't cooked, stored and handled correctly, people can become ill with food poisoning, colds, flu and other conditions.

Washing hands

Hands are the main way germs are spread, so it's important to wash them thoroughly with soap and warm water before cooking and after touching raw meat.

Raw meat, including poultry, contains harmful bacteria that can spread easily to anything it touches. This includes other food, worktops, tables, chopping boards and knives.

Take particular care to keep raw meat away from ready-to-eat foods such as bread, salad and fruit. These foods won't be cooked before you eat them so any germs that get on to them won't be killed.

The FSA says there's no clear evidence to say whether plastic or wooden chopping boards are safer for general home use. "You should use different chopping boards for raw and ready-to-eat foods.

When storing raw meat, always keep it in a clean, sealed container and place it on the bottom shelf of the fridge where it can't touch or drip on to other foods.

Don't eat these rare (not thoroughly cooked):

- Poultry
- Pork
- Burgers
- Sausages
- Rolled joints of meat
- Kebabs

Cooking

Cooking food at the right temperature will ensure that any harmful bacteria are killed. Check that food is piping hot right through to the middle before you eat it.

When cooking burgers, sausages, chicken and pork, cut into the middle to check that the meat is no longer pink and that it's piping hot (steam is coming out).

When cooking a whole chicken or other bird, pierce the thickest part of the leg (between the drumstick and the thigh) to check that the juices are no longer pink or red.

Pork joints and rolled joints shouldn't be eaten rare (not thoroughly cooked). To check when these types of joint are ready to eat, put a skewer into the centre of the meat and check that the juices are no longer pink or red.

It's safe to serve steak and other whole cuts of beef and lamb rare (not cooked in the middle) or blue (seared on the outside) as long as they have been properly sealed (cooked quickly and at a high temperature on the outside only) to kill any bacteria on the meat's surface.

If you've cooked food that you're not going to eat immediately, cool it at room temperature then store it in the fridge. Putting hot food in the fridge means it doesn't cool evenly, which can cause food poisoning.

Keep the coldest part of your fridge between 0°C and 5°C (32°F and 41°F). If your fridge has an internal freezer compartment that is iced up, the fridge could struggle to maintain its temperature.

Cleaning up

Wash worktops and chopping boards before and after cooking as they are sources of cross-contamination of germs.

A study found that the average cutting board had three times more faecal bacteria than a typical lavatory seat.

Damp sponges and cloths are the perfect place for bacteria to breed. Studies have shown the kitchen sponge to have the highest number of germs in the home. Wash and replace kitchen cloths, sponges and tea towels frequently.

Proper storage of food can reduce the risk of food poisoning. These tips will help keep your food safe to eat.

Symptoms of food poisoning

The time it takes for symptoms to develop after eating contaminated food is called the incubation period.

The incubation period can range from one hour to 90 days. Most cases of food poisoning have an incubation period of between one and three days.

The most common symptoms of food poisoning are:

- nausea,
- vomiting, and
- diarrhoea.

Other symptoms of food poisoning include:

- stomach cramps,
- abdominal pain,
- loss of appetite,
- a high temperature (fever) of 38°C (100.4°F) or above,
- muscle pain, and
- chills.

When to seek medical advice

Most cases of food poisoning do not require medical attention.

But please see a doctor if you have any of the following:

- vomiting that lasts for more than two days,
- you cannot keep liquids down for more than a day,
- diarrhoea that lasts for more than three days,
- blood in your vomit,
- blood in your stools,
- seizures (fits),
- changes in mental state, such as confusion,
- double vision,
- slurred speech, or
- signs that you may be dehydrated, such as a dry mouth, sunken eyes, and being unable to pass urine.