Rockhampion Regional Council

BBQ Food Safety

Food poisoning cases increase over the summer, so remember these simple steps to help 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.

If cooking only on the barbecue, the two main risk factors are undercooked meat and 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, these germs can be killed by cooking meat until it is piping hot throughout.



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:

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

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

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, such as sausages and burgers, must be cooked thoroughly all the way through.



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Raw meat

Germs from raw meat can move easily onto your hands and then anything else you touch, including food that is cooked and ready to eat. This is called 'cross-contamination'.

Barbecues are often the scene of crosscontamination. When raw meat juices mix with cooked or ready-to-eat food this can lead to food poisoning.

- One of the most common food handling mistakes involves people putting cooked chicken or meat back on the same plate that contains raw juices so be sure you have plenty of clean utensils and platters.
- Do not pour liquid that has been used to marinade raw meat or poultry on to cooked meats.
- Store uncooked food and ready-to-eat foods in separate sealed containers and keep them cold during transport to the barbecue. Make sure eskies are packed with enough ice/coolant to keep foods chilled.
- Always wash your hands after touching raw meat.
- Use separate utensils (plates, tongs, containers) for cooked and 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

Always keep raw meats cold and don't leave cooked foods and salads lying out in the sun for more then two hours. If bacteria that can cause food poisoning are present they can multiply quickly in warm to hot temperatures.

- If meats cooked on the barbecue are to be eaten later, make sure they are kept cold for transport back home – and then put immediately into the refrigerator!
- Cook sausages, patties and poultry thoroughly cook until juices run clear and there is no blood.
- A meat thermometer can remove the guesswork. Correct temperatures for common barbecue foods:
 - Chicken and turkey (whole), thighs, wings, legs and breasts: 74 °C
 - Minced meat, sausages: 71 °C
 - Fish: 63 °C

Finally, if you are not feeling well (symptoms may include diarrhoea, vomiting, sore throat with fever, fever or jaundice and infectious skin conditions), avoid handling food and even better, consider postponing your barbecue.

Contact us Rockhampton Regional Council Environment and Public Health Unit

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