



English
10 November 1997

Eating away from home? How to make sure food is safe

NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service
website: <http://mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au>
e-mail: mhcs@doh.health.nsw.gov.au
phone: (02) 9382 8111

NSW HEALTH
DEPARTMENT

Our busy way of life means we eat more meals in restaurants or from fast food outlets. But if this food isn't handled hygienically, or not stored at the right temperature, it can make us ill - each year in Australia 1.5 million people become ill because of something they ate.

Here's how to make sure food eaten away from home is safe

Is the restaurant or takeaway food shop clean?

Dirty floors, work surfaces and tables can carry bacteria and attract pests. If staff can't keep the premises clean, maybe they can't keep food clean either. Staff should have clean hands and clean uniforms, and handle food with tongs.

Is food either very hot or very cold?

Whether at home or in a restaurant, an important rule is that hot foods should be kept piping hot and cold foods kept very cold. Cooked foods served straight from the kitchen or hot display cabinet should be steaming hot and should be eaten straight away. Cold foods should be cold to the touch and displayed on ice or under refrigeration. Ready-made sandwiches and rolls containing perishables like cheese, eggs and meat should also be under refrigeration - otherwise don't buy them. The same goes for fresh noodle or rice products. Unless they're served hot, they should be kept under refrigeration.

Don't be afraid to send back food that's served tepid or undercooked, especially seafood, poultry and meat dishes.

It's important that mince meat dishes like mince, hamburgers and sausages are thoroughly cooked inside as well outside. The same goes for rolled roasts and chicken. With these meats, germs causing food poisoning can be all the way through the meat - not just on the surface. Thorough cooking

kills these germs. But if the meat is pink inside, and any juices are pink, rather than clear, the meat is undercooked. It's okay for beef steaks and whole beef roasts to be undercooked because germs are usually only on the surface of the meat - but it's best not to eat them too rare.

If you send back an undercooked meat or poultry dish, make sure everything else on the plate is replaced fresh too - vegetables, rice or pasta may be contaminated by juices from uncooked meat.

Eat takeaway food promptly

Leaving ready-to-eat food sitting around encourages food-poisoning bacteria to grow. If you take unfinished food home from a restaurant, get it home promptly and put it in the fridge straight away. Eat it within 24 hours.

Using salad bars and self service in restaurants and takeaway shops

Make sure food is protected by a guard - usually a clear plastic cover extending over the food to protect it from coughs and sneezes. There should be separate utensils for different foods and they should have long handles to avoid hands coming into contact with food. Again, hot foods should be very hot and cold foods, very cold.

But don't forget that one in five cases of food poisoning comes from food prepared at home. Important rules for your own kitchen: wash hands with soap and warm water for at least 30 seconds before handling food, after using the toilet, or touching animals or raw food. Use separate chopping boards for cooked and raw foods; wash utensils such as knives in hot soapy water in between use for raw and cooked foods.

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.