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› General food safety

When we talk about healthy food, we are concerned not only with food that provides nutrients for health, but also with food that is safe and not contaminated.

Each year in Australia, more than seven million people get sick from the food they eat. Food poisoning can cause severe illness and even death. Children are particularly at risk, which is why preparing and selling 'safe food' in your school canteen is very important.

The following section outlines the importance of food hygiene and safety, and gives you lots of useful tips about preparing safe food in your canteen. It provides information on legal accountabilities for school canteens, material that can be used for training, and directs you to resources that will provide you with extra information.

What is food poisoning?

Food poisoning occurs when a person eats a food which causes them to become sick. Symptoms vary, but may include one or more of the following:

- nausea
- vomiting
- stomach cramps
- diarrhoea
- fever or chills
- headaches.

Germs that often cause food poisoning are everywhere in our environment – in the soil, on animals, on people and on everyday things people touch and use – but are too small to see with the naked eye. Sometimes foods naturally contain the germs and other times foods may become contaminated. Food contamination can occur as a result of:

- people working with food
- other food that is already contaminated
- dirty equipment and benches
- animals and insects near food.

Under the right conditions germs on food can multiply rapidly – a single bacterium can multiply into more than two million bacteria in just seven hours! The good news is that by controlling the conditions that germs need to grow we can prevent food poisoning.

› Food safety and food handling requirements

Food safety and food handling requirements in the canteen cover:

- personal hygiene practices
- food preparation practices
- food storage and cleaning procedures.

Personal hygiene practices

- Wash your hands with warm soapy water and dry thoroughly with paper towel:
 - before touching food
 - after visiting the toilet
 - after blowing your nose or sneezing into your hand
 - after touching your hair
 - after handling garbage
 - after touching animals
 - after smoking
 - after handling money.
- Keep long hair tied back or covered so that it does not fall in the food.
- If you have a cut or sore on your hands, cover with a brightly coloured waterproof dressing and wear gloves before touching food.
- If you have an infectious illness (for example flu or a gastric upset), you should not work with food as you may spread diseases to other people or contaminate food.
- Wear a clean apron while preparing food.
- Use a handkerchief or tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- If possible, make handling the money and the cash register a separate responsibility, so the person handling money does not need to come into contact with the food.

HINT: *Make a habit of saying to volunteers 'After you wash your hands, would you please be able to help me ...'*

Posters on personal hygiene and hand-washing are available from the Department of Human Services (DHS) Food Safety Unit. You can display these above your wash basin in the canteen. To order, go to: www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety or telephone 1300 364 352.

› Food preparation

Two important elements of food preparation are temperature control and the prevention of cross-contamination.

Temperature control

Bacteria that commonly cause food poisoning grow quickly in temperatures between 5°C and 60°C – commonly known as the temperature danger zone. It is very important to limit the time high-risk foods spend in the danger zone. High-risk foods have common features that most bacteria need to grow. Such foods contain protein and are usually moist or wet, for example meat, poultry, dairy products, eggs, smallgoods, seafood, cooked rice, cooked pasta, prepared salads, coleslaw, pasta salads and fruit salads. There are a number of precautions that can be taken to decrease the risk of food poisoning.

- Make sure food is thoroughly cooked or reheated and that the centre has reached 75°C – cooking food over 75°C kills most of the bacteria.
- Ensure that cold food is stored below 5°C.
- Ensure that frozen food is stored below minus 15°C.
- Ensure that hot food is maintained over 60°C.
- Minimise the time that food is kept in the temperature danger zone – between 5°C and 60°C.
- Avoid leaving food that has just been cooked out on the bench to cool for more than one hour. Once it has cooled, immediately place it in the refrigerator. Food Safety Victoria recommends when cooling hot, high-risk foods that they are cooled from 60°C to 21°C within two hours and to 5°C within a further four hours.

Cross-contamination

Cross-contamination occurs when germs that are naturally found on raw food move or are transferred onto cooked food. To prevent this, cooked foods and raw foods should be stored separately.

HINT: Designate shelves in refrigerators for specific foods and label these. Raw meats should be well-wrapped and stored on trays on a shelf below fruit and vegetables to avoid juices dripping on the food and causing cross-contamination.

Receiving food

- Ensure that supplied perishable foods are being transported in a refrigerated food vehicle or container. Check the temperature of deliveries on arrival.

- Check deliveries of dry goods for quality. Broken packaging and damage may mean the contents are contaminated and therefore not suitable for consumption.

Preparing food

- Ensure that benches are clean.
- Ensure that there are suitable areas for food preparation,
- Keep animals out of food preparation areas.
- Use separate chopping boards and utensils for raw and cooked foods.
- If possible, use separate areas to prepare raw and cooked foods.
- If you cannot have separate areas, ensure that the bench is washed with hot soapy water and sanitised with a commercial sanitiser after preparing raw foods and before preparing cooked foods.
- Rinse raw fruit and vegetables well in plain water and remove visible dirt particles.

Handling food

- Use separate cleaning cloths for raw and cooked food preparation areas.
- Avoid handling food with bare hands. Wearing disposable gloves or using a kitchen utensil is preferable. Change disposable gloves as regularly as you would wash your hands.
- Always put on new gloves between handling raw foods and ready-to-eat foods.
- Remove gloves when handling money or non-food objects.

Cooking and heating

- When cooking or reheating high-risk foods, make sure the centre of the food is thoroughly heated and has reached 75°C.
- Meat is not properly cooked unless the juices run clear.
- When reheating food, ensure that it is brought to the boil and simmered for at least five minutes. The centre of the food must reach 75°C.
- Thaw frozen food on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator and keep it in the refrigerator until it is ready to be cooked.
- If food is to be cooked from a frozen state, take extra care to ensure that it is cooked right through.
- When using a microwave oven to thaw food, be aware that the food must be cooked immediately afterwards.
- Be aware that microwave ovens can heat unevenly. If using a microwave for cooking and heating, stir the food regularly and ensure that heat is evenly distributed.
- Never refreeze food that has been thawed.

› Food storage and display

- Check equipment temperatures regularly and report malfunctioning equipment immediately.
- Pack foods carefully so as not to damage the packaging.
- Do not use swollen cans or damaged food packets, as the food inside may be spoiled.
- Use and store foods so that older products are used first. For example, do not empty a new bag of flour into a plastic bin on top of the old flour. Finish the old flour before refilling the bin.
- Cover foods stored in the refrigerator with plastic wrap or foil to prevent food spilling over.
- Do not overfill front-loading refrigeration display cabinets; otherwise the cold air may be prevented from flowing around the foods inside.
- Check that food looks and smells good before using it. Remember, if in doubt, throw it out!
- Before using fruit and vegetables, wash carefully to remove dirt and germs.
- Store chemicals, cleaning equipment and personal belongings away from food preparation and food storage areas.
- Wrap or cover displayed food.
- Monitor use-by dates on food packaging. Food should not be sold or eaten beyond its use-by date, as it may not be safe.

HINT: Mark the date on prepared food before storing it.

› Cleaning procedures

- Before cooking, wipe down benches and other equipment with hot soapy water and sanitise. Use a commercial sanitiser and follow the directions on the label carefully.
- After cooking, wash the benches and other equipment in hot soapy water, sanitise and allow to air dry. If it is necessary for you to dry the equipment immediately, ensure that the cloth you use is clean.
- Store saucepans and containers upside down.
- Write procedures for the storage and disposal of garbage and the location of bins and make sure that all workers follow them.
- Clean the floors and walls regularly.
- Have a cleaning roster or routine, record chart and procedures displayed in the canteen to ensure that all duties are performed regularly.

HINT: Mark regular 'spring cleaning' working-bee days on your calendar at the beginning of the year. This will ensure that the larger cleaning tasks, for example washing walls and rangehoods, are not overlooked. Plan this day for a quiet time of year such as school holidays. Recruit volunteers to help with the working-bee and see if the cleaning and maintenance person at the school is available to help.



› Legal requirements and processes

Under Victoria's *Food Act 1984* and the subsequent *Food Amendment Act 1997* and *Food Amendment Act 2001*, school canteens in Victoria are required to be registered as a Class 2 food premises by their local council, which involves developing a Food Safety Program (FSP). This ensures that all the food they prepare and serve is safe to eat.

Most school canteens in Victoria base their FSP on a Department of Human Services-registered template. Templates are an easy way to write an FSP and may be quicker and simpler than employing someone to write one for the business.

A template is a simple document that describes a standard approach and the steps required to ensure that the food that is sold is safe to eat. A generic template, the 'Food safety program template for retail and food service businesses', as well as other resources on FSPs, can be downloaded from the DHS website at: www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety.

FSPs can also be completed online at: www.foodsmart.vic.gov.au.

Food businesses may alternatively choose to develop their own independent FSP, which will have to be audited by a certified food safety auditor.

As each local council differs in its requirements, it is important to contact your council to find out exactly what is required for your school.

An important part of the FSP is the appointment of a food safety supervisor. This person has the authority, skills and knowledge to ensure that all food handlers who work (paid or voluntary) in that establishment have the skills and knowledge for the job they do. To be deemed competent, the food safety supervisor must complete units of competence from a registered training organisation.

› Training providers

For information on registered training organisations that provide food safety training, visit the following websites:

National Training Information Service

www.ntis.gov.au

Education Network Australia

www.edna.edu.au

TAFE Courses Directory

www.tafe.vic.gov.au

Australian School Canteens Association

www.asca.com.au

Telephone 1800 219 566

Victorian Home Economics and Textiles Teachers' Association

www.vhetta.com.au

Telephone (03) 9888 2240

More information on food safety supervisor skills and knowledge can be found on the DHS food safety website: www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety or by telephone on 1300 364 352. Alternatively, you can contact your local council health department for more information.

Auditing for Class 2 food premises occurs at least annually, as determined by the Secretary of the Department of Human Services. Class 2 food businesses using a registered template can choose either to have their FSP audited by a certified food safety auditor, or have their FSP compliance checked by the local municipal council. Class 2 food businesses with their own independent FSP need to have the FSP audited by a certified food safety auditor. You have the responsibility to engage the services of an approved auditor and ensure that your FSP and records are on the premises at all times.