

# **Food Safety Advice for Home Caterers**

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## **We are often asked "Can I run a food business from home?"**

Although in theory the answer to this question is YES - there are many serious considerations and implications which can easily make the answer NO! If you have an idea about what you want to do in your business, it is worth speaking to someone in Environmental Health at an early stage to make sure that there aren't any special requirements that might affect what you want to do. This advice is free, and might end up saving you money in the long run!

As the person preparing or handling the food, it is your responsibility to make sure that your food does not make people ill.

You must comply with the FOOD SAFETY & HYGIENE (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2013 and REGULATION (EC) No 853/2004. These Regulations lay down the requirements relating to persons engaged in the handling of food, the methods and practices used in food businesses and structural matters in food premises.

If you do not comply you may be guilty of an offence and liable to prosecution, but more unfortunately, you may sell your customers contaminated food.

In addition you must meet the requirements of the food labelling laws. These state that all pre-packed foods must be labelled with certain information relating to ingredients, name of producer, sell by dates etc. Further information on this can be obtained from Essex County Council Trading Standards (0845 603 7626).

### **REGISTRATION**

Your home will have to be registered with the Council as a food business. This is free, and there is only one simple form to fill in, but it is a legal requirement and you can be prosecuted if you do not register before starting. Contact us for a form on:

- **Tel: 01268 533333**
- **Email: [ehs@basildon.gov.uk](mailto:ehs@basildon.gov.uk)**
- **Web: [www.basildon.gov.uk](http://www.basildon.gov.uk)**

## **FOOD SAFETY LAW**

The laws on food safety apply just the same to a business run from home as they do to all other commercial premises. You are still likely to receive regular inspections by officers from the Council's environmental health service, and you may face legal action if you are found to be breaking the food hygiene laws. This also applies if you use a kitchen somewhere else to prepare food, for example a village or community hall kitchen.

## **TRAINING**

You may need to attend a training course. One of the main requirements of the law is that all food handlers must know enough about food safety to allow them to work safely. This usually means passing a training course in food hygiene, at a level which is appropriate to the type of food being prepared.

**We can offer advice about what level of training you would need, details on the food safety course run by this council and where other course providers can be found.**

## **YOUR KITCHEN**

Domestic kitchens are not designed for commercial use and so might need some alteration to comply with the food safety laws. Common problems include the following:-

- Lack of access to a wash basin just for washing hands.
- A toilet or bathroom which opens directly on to the kitchen.
- Decorative finishes which are not “easily cleanable” as required by the law.
- Domestic quality equipment which is not up to the standard needed for commercial use.
- Not enough storage or refrigeration space for large volumes of food.
- Inadequate ventilation leading to condensation, mould growth, and damage to decoration.
- Problems with keeping the kitchen free of flies, ants, and other sources of contamination.
- Limited space and worktops so that “cross contamination” becomes difficult to prevent.
- Access to the kitchen by children, pets, or other people, which can make good hygiene difficult.
- Separating family use of the kitchen from business use can be very awkward, but is essential for good food hygiene and to prevent the spread of illness (e.g. food preparation; laundry, etc).

The standards you will have to meet depend upon a number of factors such as the type and quantity of food you intend to prepare, and what else the kitchen is used for. Since each case and each kitchen is different you will need to talk to your Environmental Health service to decide exactly what is necessary.

**In general, we recommend that any business which intends to prepare food in anything more than very small quantities, or is only producing low risk food such as non dairy cakes, should be operating from properly designed and equipped commercial premises - and not from an ordinary domestic kitchen.**

## **FOOD SAFETY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

Food safety law requires you to write down simple details of what you do to make sure that the food produced or sold at your premises is safe to eat.

You must consider:

- Possible food safety hazards that could be relevant to your business
- Things that must be checked to ensure food is safe
- Records of any important checks adapted to and relevant to your business on things like cleaning, correct cooking, chilling of food or the prevention of cross contamination

In order to comply with this requirement you may follow the guidance issued by the Food Standards Agency **Safer Food Better Business (England)** which will guide you through how to comply and provide the necessary documentation for small and medium businesses.

**If you would like to obtain a copy of the pack, this can be downloaded and printed from the Food Standards Agencies Website.  
<http://www.food.gov.uk/business-industry/caterers/sfbb/>**

Alternatively you may wish to use a different system.

Larger more complex food businesses may require specialist training or need to employ the help of a consultant to implement a bespoke food safety management system based on the principles of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP).

Smaller businesses may want to use a simple and concise system designed themselves or adapted from elsewhere.

**We can advise you on what system best suits your circumstances and in some cases provide templates to work from.** A template document suitable for home cake makers can be found on the Basildon Council website at [www.basildon.gov.uk](http://www.basildon.gov.uk).

## **UNDERSTANDING FOOD POISONING**

A very wide range of foods can cause food poisoning if not handled properly.

- Raw poultry, and raw eggs may contain food poisoning bacteria.
- Undercooked poultry can result in food poisoning.
- Sauces and desserts that contain uncooked or lightly cooked raw eggs, such as mousses and homemade ice creams, may cause problems too.
- Meat and meat products, and shellfish have also been identified as the cause of illness in food poisoning outbreaks.
- Likewise, you need to be careful with raw salad and vegetables that will be eaten uncooked.

Many foods can be a source of food poisoning bacteria – proper precautions must be taken in preparing them.

Some of the most common errors that may lead to food poisoning are:

- Poor storage
- Inappropriate temperature control
- Inadequate cooking
- Not separating raw and ready to eat

These are explained on the next few pages.

## **STORAGE**

Inappropriate storage is one of the most common faults reported as contributing to food poisoning outbreaks. Food is often left unrefrigerated for prolonged periods.

Don't take chances. Ensure you've got the fridge and freezer capacity needed to keep food cool and safe.

Domestic fridges are not designed to cope with the large amounts of food prepared in the home for functions.

Check food labels for storage instructions, and then follow them.

In case there are any drips from raw meat, poultry or fish, keep these items at the bottom of the fridge, below where any ready to eat food is stored, and in a leak proof container. Protect the salad tray from any drips too.

Keep raw and ready to eat food separate.

Don't clutter up the fridge with alcohol and soft drinks. They do not need to be refrigerated. Maximise the available fridge space for perishable items.

## **TEMPERATURE CONTROL**

It is important to keep perishable foods in the fridge particularly in the summer, as most bacteria grow above 5°C. It is a legal requirement to keep such foods below 8°C.

Remember:

- The warmest part of your fridge should be kept between 0°C and 5°C. Use a fridge thermometer to check the temperature regularly.
- Don't overload your fridge. The efficiency of the fridge will suffer if the cooling air circulating within it cannot flow freely.
- Keep the fridge door closed as much as possible. Leaving the fridge door open raises the temperature.

Prepare food that needs to be kept in the fridge last. Don't leave it standing around at room temperature. Leaving ready to eat food at room temperature for a long time can allow harmful bacteria to grow.

Cooked foods that need to be chilled should be cooled as quickly as possible, preferably within an hour. Avoid putting them in the fridge until they are cool, because this will push up the temperature of the fridge.

To cool hot food quickly, place it in the coolest place you can find where it is not exposed to any risk of contamination. Another way is to put the food in a clean, sealable container and put it under a running cold water tap or in a basin of cold water, or use ice packs in cool bags. Where practical reduce cooling times by dividing foods into smaller amounts.

Once the food is prepared, getting it to where the function is being held can be a problem. This can be particularly difficult when there are large quantities of perishable food involved. Use cool boxes with frozen ice packs.

You will also need to check that the facilities at the place where the function is being held are adequate for keeping hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Adequate fridge and cooker capacity there is just as important as in the home.

Hot foods (once cooked) must be kept to a temperature of 63°C or above.

## **COOKING**

Cooking food thoroughly is the key to killing most of the harmful bacteria that cause food poisoning. Large joints of meat or whole poultry are more difficult to prepare safely, so take care with them.

Make sure meat and poultry are fully thawed before cooking or expected cooking times might not be long enough. You can thaw food in the fridge (this is the best method), by microwaving or leaving at room temperature.

Use any cooking instructions on the packaging as a guide, but always check that the core temperature of the food is piping hot. It is recommended that the core temperature reaches a minimum of 75°C.

Domestic ovens may not have the capacity to handle the amounts of food needed to be cooked for functions, particularly if large joints of meat and whole poultry are involved.

- Make sure cooked food is not reheated more than once;
- Always heat until piping hot all the way through, it is a legal requirement to reheat foods to a core temperature of 75°C
- Don't be tempted to cut cooking times just because people are waiting to eat. This is particularly important when microwaving or barbecuing;
- Take proper care with leftovers. Throw away any perishable food that has been standing at room temperature for more than a couple of hours, and throw away any food scraps;
- Store leftovers in the fridge and eat within 48 hours;

## **PREPARING FOOD**

It is important to separate raw and ready to eat food at all times. If raw food is allowed to touch or drip onto ready to eat food, harmful bacteria can be transferred onto the ready to eat food.

When preparing food, bacteria can also be spread from hands, cloths, knives and chopping boards, so make sure these are all cleaned thoroughly after contact with raw food. The transfer of bacteria from one food to another is called cross contamination and is a major cause of food poisoning.

Cooking for large numbers can mean more people in the kitchen at the same time. There are likely to be greater quantities of food, raw and ready to eat. More pots, pans, plates and utensils will be used. There will be more washing up and greater problems keeping worktops clean.

Here are some basic rules that will help you keep food safe:

- Prepare raw food and ready to eat food separately. Don't use the same knife or chopping board for raw meat, ready to eat foods and raw fruit and vegetables.
- Wash dishes, worktops and cutlery with hot water and detergent. Use a dishwasher where possible. Use an antibacterial cleaner but check what the contact time is.
- Wash hands regularly with warm water and soap to keep them clean. Always wash them before touching food, after using the toilet, after touching pets or the dustbin, and when they look dirty.
- Hands should also be washed frequently while preparing food, especially between handling raw and ready to eat foods. Make sure your tap isn't contaminated by juices from raw food. Use a paper towel to turn off the tap after handwashing.
- Keep dishcloths clean and change them frequently. Also change tea towels and hand towels often. Disposable paper towels provide a better option as they can be thrown away immediately after use.
- If you have any cuts or grazes on exposed areas, make sure these are kept covered with a waterproof dressing. Don't wipe your hands on the tea towel, use a separate kitchen towel.
- Keep anyone who is ill, or has been recently ill, out of the kitchen, even if they're not handling food. Particularly if they have had diarrhoea or have been vomiting.

**If you employ staff you must make them aware that they must not work when suffering from sickness or diarrhoea and that they must be fully recovered before working again. If they are taking medication for the illness such as Immodium this may relieve the symptoms but not stop them infecting others.**



## **VULNERABLE GROUPS**

Take extra care if babies, toddlers, pregnant women, older people and anyone who is ill are attending the function, as food poisoning bacteria can make them very ill. The illness that these groups suffer is often more severe and can be life threatening.

These groups should avoid pate, soft ripened cheeses and unpasteurised dairy products such as brie, camembert and blue-vein types. These commonly contain Listeria which can cause serious illness.

## **BIG FUNCTIONS, BIG RESPONSIBILITIES**

Catering from home means that you might be preparing food for more people than usual, cooking foods that you don't cook very often and storing large amounts of food. All of these have safety implications.

You might find it useful 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 are asking it to do?
- How will you cope with extra people in the kitchen, extra clutter, more dirty dishes, plates, utensils and messier worktops? You will need to ensure any helpers also understand the need for good hygiene practice.
- Can you get the food to the function safely? When you have it there, will you have the necessary facilities for safe refrigerated storage and proper reheating?

## **TEN TIPS FOR FOOD SAFETY**

1. Take chilled and frozen food home quickly - then put it in your fridge or freezer at once.
2. Prepare and store raw and cooked food separately - keep raw meat and fish at the bottom of your fridge.
3. Keep the warmest part of your fridge at 0° - 5°C -get a fridge thermometer.
4. Check 'use by' dates - use food within the stated period.
5. Keep pets away from food and dishes and worktops.
6. Wash hands thoroughly before preparing food, after going to the toilet or after handling pets.

7. Keep your kitchen clean - wash and disinfect worktops and utensils between handling food which is to be cooked and food which is not.
8. Do not use raw eggs in uncooked or lightly cooked foods - such as home-made mayonnaise, mousse, cake icing and hollandaise sauce - use pasteurised egg instead.
9. Cook food well - follow the instructions on the pack. If you re-heat make sure it is piping hot.
10. Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold - don't just leave them standing around.

**Should you require further information, please contact:**

**Environmental Health Services, Basildon Borough Council, The Basildon Centre, St Martin's Square, Basildon, Essex, SS14 1DL**

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