

Food safety in child-care facilities

Eating food contaminated with germs causes foodborne illness, also known as food poisoning. Common symptoms include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, stomach pain and fever.

Children 5 years and under are at a higher risk of getting sick because their immune systems are not fully developed. Proper food handling in child-care facilities can help prevent foodborne illness.

How can I prevent foodborne illness?

Clean

Wash your hands with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds before you eat or handle any food and after you use the washroom.

Thoroughly wash fruits and vegetables under cool, running water before cutting or serving them, even if you plan to peel them. Use a clean produce brush to scrub fruits and vegetables with firm skin like carrots, potatoes and cantaloupes.

Wash plates, utensils, cutting boards and countertops with hot soapy water. Sanitize kitchen surfaces and tools after cleaning. Use approved food surface sanitizers and follow instructions on the product label. Some dishwashers can sanitize. Check the manual of your dishwasher to find out if yours does.

Separate

Germs from raw foods can spread to other foods when not handled properly. This is

called cross contamination. To reduce the risk:

- Separate raw meat, poultry and seafood from other foods in the grocery cart, shopping bags and fridge
- Use one cutting board for raw meats and a different one for ready-to-eat foods like fresh fruits and vegetables

Cook

Cook foods to an internal temperature of 74°C (165°F) or hotter to kill germs. To check the temperature, insert a clean food thermometer all the way to the middle of the food and avoid touching any bones.

Some packaged foods are fully cooked and ready-to-eat. Other foods are not and may contain raw ingredients. Always read the label and follow cooking and storage instructions.

Foods heated in the microwave can have hot and cold patches. To make sure that microwaved foods cook or reheat evenly:

- Stir or rotate food halfway through cooking
- Let food stand for at least 2 minutes at the end of heating
- Check the temperature in many spots

Chill

Germs grow rapidly at temperatures between 4°C and 60°C. This is called the “danger zone”. Never thaw foods at room temperature. The safest way to thaw food is in the fridge.

- Place the food in a drip-proof container and store it on the bottom shelf
- To thaw faster, place food under cold water or use the microwave. If you defrost food in the microwave, cook it right away

Do not keep meat, poultry, fish, dairy or cooked leftovers at room temperature for more than 2 hours. Put them in the fridge or freezer as soon as possible.

Large or very hot items such as lasagnas or soups are difficult to cool. To help cool foods quickly:

- Use shallow containers
- Split larger items into smaller portions
- Cool very hot items at room temperature at first. Place them in the fridge when steaming stops
- Leave food uncovered until it reaches fridge temperature

Avoid higher risk foods

Some types of foods are higher risk for children 5 and under. Avoid serving:

- Unpasteurized milk and juice
- Raw or undercooked eggs, meat, poultry or seafood
- Raw sprouts
- Honey for children under 1 year

Don't prepare foods when you are sick

If you have any illness that can spread, especially diarrhea, nausea or vomiting, you should not prepare food for others.

How can parents pack food safely?

If you send food with your children, support them to do so safely. Remind them to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.

- A thermos will keep foods hot, above 60°C (140°F) for about 3 hours. It's best to pack these just before leaving the home
- Use ice packs in a lunch box, or store lunches in the daycare fridge to keep foods cold

Where can I find safe foods to serve to children?

Child-care facilities should buy foods from approved sources, such as commercial retail stores or suppliers. Use fresh and packaged foods by the best before date.

Does my child-care facility need a food service permit?

Some licensed child-care facilities require a food service permit. This will depend on the number of children in your facility and the types of food you serve. Contact a licensing officer at your local public health unit for more information.

What training is available for child-care providers?

Caring About Food Safety is a free online course:

www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/keeping-bc-healthy-safe/food-safety/food-safety-courses

FOODSAFE levels 1 and 2 are offered in-person and online. Course fees vary: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/keeping-bc-healthy-safe/food-safety/food-safety-courses

For More Information

BC FOODSAFE: Food Safety Resources: www.foodsafe.ca/resources.html

Health Canada: Food Safety:
www.canada.ca/en/services/health/food-safety.html