

Food safety advice for preparing meals

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Food safety advice for preparing takeaway meals

All food businesses (this includes clubs / organisations who serve food to the public) are required by law to have some sort of food safety hazard analysis to show how they are producing safe food. This is based on the principles of HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points).

You therefore need to examine each safety point in turn.

All food served should be prepared on the premises or purchased from a reputable supplier. The organisation's food registration does not cover food produced at home.

Storage

Bacteria will survive and grow in foods of this type where they are not refrigerated properly. This then has the potential to cause food poisoning.

Ingredients that require chilled storage (such as dairy items) must be kept in suitable refrigerated conditions, below 8°C ideally between 1-5°C

You must have some method of being able to monitor the temperature in your fridges

Cooking

Failure to adequately cook food can lead to the survival and growth of bacteria. This is especially the case with meat products.

Ensure that a satisfactory cooking temperature is achieved for your products.

This can be monitored in the following ways:

1. Colour change - meat cooked from raw changes colour when fully cooked. Check in the thickest part.
2. Steaming hot - cut into the product and see if there is steam coming from it.
3. Temperature - take the core temperature of the product using a probe thermometer after sanitising the probe first. The temperature should be above 75°C.

To minimise risks, food should ideally be prepared, cooked, cooled (if necessary) and provided on the same day.

Hot holding

Food once cooked, must be held at a safe temperature (above 63°C) until it is eaten. As per the advice above, take the core temperature of the product using a probe thermometer after sanitising the probe first.

Cooling

Allowing foods to cool slowly can allow the growth of pathogenic bacteria.

Following cooking, food must be cooled and refrigerated as soon as possible (within 90 minutes) and always protected from contamination during the cooling process.

Containers

Food should be provided to your customers in disposable food grade containers (like the ones you get from takeaways) ensuring that they are fully sealed and labelled as per the instructions below.

Providing food hot - collection

If this is something you intend to do, you must ensure your customers are aware the food is for immediate consumption. – or given appropriate instructions on how to safely cool, store and then reheat the product. Use by guidance should also be provided (please refer to labelling section below).

Providing food hot - delivery

The same goes here. You must also ensure that the food is transported safely and in cases of journeys longer than 10-15 minutes, it would be good practice to use an insulated bag. Unless you have a refrigerated vehicle for cold food or bags that are able to keep food warm for long periods, it would be advisable to keep your journeys short (i.e. less than 1 hour round trip) and not to take too much out in one go.

Delivery bags/delivery drivers

If you use insulated bags or reusable bags for delivery, you must ensure these are kept clean. Regularly clean them using your normal antibacterial spray and

disposable towel. Drivers should be provided with antibacterial hand gel and regular hand washing encouraged in accordance with the PHE/NHS guidance.

Labelling

There are a few issues you have to consider here.

Should you be providing the food hot you must ensure the customer is made aware that the food is intended for immediate consumption.

It is possible, that people may be tempted to “stock pile” meals so it would be advisable to also provide them with information on other things such as how to safely cool, store and reheat products as follows.

- a) If the food requires cooling, advise your customer that this should be done as quickly as possible (i.e. within 90 minutes of it being cooked). An example of a safe way to do this is to spread the food out on a plate.
- b) Storage – food should be stored in your fridge below 8°C and used within 2 days of receipt
- c) Freezing – this food is not suitable for home freezing
- d) Reheating – ensure food is reheated thoroughly either using a microwave or in the oven. Look for steam or bubbles as signs the food is hot enough and ensure it is heated all the way through. Once reheated, consume immediately and only reheat the once.
- e) Allergens – **all** allergens must be labelled clearly on the product. If you are unsure what the 14 allergens are – guidance can be obtained from <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-food-businesses>

Record keeping

You are strongly advised to keep a record of temperatures for your fridge, cooked food, hot hold etc. For smaller operations (especially those serving vulnerable members of the community) it would be a good idea to also keep a note of the number of meals produced. Larger organisations will be able to trace such things electronically.