

Most community social gatherings provide drinks and snacks and many will also want to offer food. These basic food safety guidelines will help reduce the risk of food poisoning at events offering catering.

Stocking the café and pricing

One approach which Community Exchanges have used is to ask local people to bake cakes and biscuits and reimburse them for their costs. Crosthwaite Exchange uses the following formula: 2 x cost of their ingredients + 25%.

Price your food reasonably, so it's affordable, but to make a small profit so that your project becomes financially sustainable. One Exchange makes 70 per cent profit on their cakes and drinks which keeps prices low but allows them to cover their costs and donate surplus money to community projects.



Flowers and tablecloths can brighten up the room

Atmosphere and appearance

To create a welcoming environment and to help make the room attractive consider using the following;

- Matching aprons for helpers so that they can be easily identified
- Tablecloths and flowers on tables and smart crockery.

Planning

It will help if you plan your events carefully and make sure you do the following:

- DON'T make food too far in advance.
- DON'T leave food standing around for several hours in a warm room before it is eaten.
- DO make sure you've got enough fridge and freezer space.
- DO take special care with vulnerable groups; older people, young children and pregnant women are most likely to become seriously ill if they get food poisoning.

Cleanliness

- Keep hands clean at all times!
- Keep cloths, sponges and tea towels clean or consider using disposable kitchen towels

Chilling

- Make sure you've got enough space to keep food cool
- Follow storage instructions on food and don't use after the "use by" date

Cooking

- Always make sure food is piping hot right the way through
- Don't re-heat more than once and eat leftovers within 48 hours

Cross-contamination

- Keep raw meat away from "ready to eat" food which won't be cooked
- Use separate knives and chopping boards for meat and fruit and vegetables or clean between uses

Cleanliness

Your hands can easily spread bacteria around the kitchen and onto food and so it's important to always wash your hands. Unfortunately, food poisoning statistics suggest that washing hands may be overlooked or not carried out thoroughly. Remember to use hot running water (ideally 45 to 50°C) and soap, rub hands vigorously, rinse hands under running water, dry thoroughly using a clean paper towel.

Dirty, damp cloths are the perfect place for bacteria to breed so it's very important to wash kitchen cloths and sponges regularly and leave them to dry before using them again. If you want to choose the safest option, you could use disposable kitchen towels to wipe worktops and chopping boards. These are less likely to spread bacteria than cloths you use again.

Tea towels can also spread bacteria. Remember, if you wipe your hands on a tea towel after you have touched raw meat, this will spread bacteria to the towel. Then, if you use the tea towel to dry a plate, the bacteria will spread to the plate.

Cutlery and crockery should be washed in a dishwasher if possible as they wash at a high temperature which is a good way to clean equipment and kill bacteria. If you do not have a dishwasher, use hot soapy water to remove grease, food and dirt then immerse them in very hot, clean water. Leave to air dry if possible.



Covers for cakes help keep them fresh

Chilling

Inappropriate storage is one of the most common problems which can contribute to food poisoning outbreaks.

Make sure you've got the fridge and freezer capacity needed to keep food cool and safe. Keep perishable food in the fridge, particularly in the summer, as most bacteria grow quickly at temperatures above 5°C.

Remember:

- The coldest part of your fridge should be kept between 0°C and 5°C (32-41°F). 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 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. Where practical, reduce cooling times by dividing foods into smaller amounts.
- If you need to transport food to your venue, for example from home to a village hall or community building, use cool boxes.
- Always follow storage instructions on products. Highly perishable foods will have a "use-by" date and generally require refrigeration. Do not serve food after the "Use by date" even if it looks and smells fine as it could put health at risk.
- "Best before" dates indicate when food is as at its best. They are applicable to most foods other than highly perishable ones.

Cooking

Cooking food thoroughly is the key to killing most of the harmful bacteria that cause food poisoning.

Bacteria multiply at temperatures between 5°C and 63°C, the ideal temperature for bacterial multiplication is 37°C. Bacteria multiply more slowly at temperatures below 5°C and at temperatures above 63°C most food poisoning bacteria die.

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

Use any cooking instructions on packaging as a guide, but always check that the centre of the food is piping hot. Cut open food with a small knife so that you can check that it is hot in the middle.

If you are checking burgers, sausages, pork and chicken, cut into the middle and check there is no pink meat left. The meat should also be piping hot in the middle.

If you're checking a whole chicken or other fowl, pierce the thickest part of the leg (between drumstick and thigh) with a clean knife or skewer until the juices run out. The juices shouldn't have any pink or red in them. Using a meat thermometer is the most reliable method for taking the temperature of joints.

Hot food should be served immediately and not kept warm for bacteria to multiply.

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 all food scraps. Store other leftovers in clean, covered containers in the fridge and eat within 48 hours.

Make sure cooked food is not re-heated more than once. Always heat until piping hot all the way through. If the food is only warm it might not be safe to eat. Do not reheat rice.



Cross contamination

Cross contamination is the transfer of bacteria from foods (usually raw) to other food. Bacteria can also be transferred to foods via hands, work surfaces and equipment such as knives. Cross contamination is a major cause of food poisoning.

It's especially important to keep raw meat away from ready-to-eat foods, such as salad, fruit and bread. This is because these foods will not be cooked before you eat them, so any bacteria that get onto the foods will not be killed.

These basic rules will help you to keep food safe:

- Prepare raw and ready-to-eat food separately. Don't use the same knife or chopping board for raw meat, ready-to-eat food and raw fruit or vegetables unless they are cleaned thoroughly between uses.
- Wash dishes, worktops and cutlery with hot water and detergent.
- Hands should also be washed frequently with warm water and soap while preparing food, especially between handling raw and ready-to-eat foods, particularly after you have touched raw chicken or meat.
- Keep dish cloths clean and change them frequently. Also change tea towels and hand towels often. You might find paper towels a more practical option.
- 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.
- Don't add sauce or marinade to cooked food if it has been used with raw chicken or meat.
- Store raw chicken and meat in a dish, on the bottom shelf of the fridge where it does not touch or drip onto other foods.
- Use separate tongs and utensils for raw meat and cooked meat.

Next steps and training

A number of Exchanges have volunteers who have had training in Food Safety. One course to consider is the CIEH Level 2 Award in Food Safety Catering. It usually runs as a one-day course with an exam at the end. All the Further Education colleges in Cumbria run it.

An alternative is to undertake a food safety course online. Only those accredited by CIEH (Chartered Institute of Environmental Health) are recommended and can be found by searching for *CIEH accredited food safety online training*.

If you have teams of volunteers who each help at one Exchange per month then you could consider having one person in each team who has undertaken a relevant training course.

The Food Standards Agency is a UK-wide, independent Government agency, providing advice and information to the public and Government on food safety, nutrition and diet. It has useful information and their *Safer Food, Better Business for Caterers* pack is available free. Contact them on Tel: 020 7276 8829 or via their website: www.food.gov.uk



Make sure your volunteers are aware of food safety and consider undertaking training

Village Hall Information Sheet 20 *Health and Hygiene in Village Halls* contains useful information about cleanliness for village halls and community buildings and is available from ACT.

Other Exchanges have invited their local Environmental Health Officers to inspect their premises and implemented their recommendations. Environmental Health Officers are based at Borough and District Councils.

Borough Council Contacts

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Barrow Borough Council

Tel: 01229 876300 www.barrowbc.gov.uk

Carlisle City Council

Tel: 01228 817000 www.carlisle.gov.uk

Copeland Borough Council

Tel: 0845 054 8600 www.copeland.gov.uk

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