

# Barbecues

How to prepare food correctly, avoid contamination and cook food properly for your barbecues.

Summer is the perfect time to enjoy a barbecue with family and friends, but you need to ensure that food is stored and cooked safely.

Warm weather and outdoor cooking can produce the right conditions for the bacteria which cause [food poisoning](#).

So it's vital you remember the 4C's of food hygiene:

- [chilling](#)
- [cleaning](#)
- [cooking](#)
- [cross-contamination](#)

We have put together some advice to help you serve up a sensational barbecue while keeping your guests safe.

## Chilling and defrosting

[Chilling](#) food properly helps stop harmful bacteria from growing, especially in the warm summer months.

To keep your food safe:

- don't defrost foods at room temperature
- defrost food overnight in the fridge or if this is not possible, using a microwave on the defrost setting directly before cooking
- cool cooked foods quickly at room temperature and then place in the fridge within one to two hours
- store raw foods separately from ready-to-eat foods, covered on the bottom shelf of your fridge
- keep chilled food out of the fridge for the shortest time possible during preparation
- keep any food with a use-by date, cooked dishes, salads and ready-to-eat desserts chilled and out of the sun until serving time
- don't overfill your fridge, this allows air to circulate and maintains the set temperature

Some foods need to be kept in the fridge to help slow down the growth of bacteria and keep food fresh and safe for longer. Use a fridge thermometer to check the temperature is below 5°C as the dials on fridges don't always show you the right temperature.

## Cooking

[Cooking food](#) at the right temperature and for the correct length of time will ensure that any harmful bacteria are killed.

Don't forget, charred on the outside doesn't always mean cooked on the inside. Before serving meat that you have cooked on the barbecue, always check that:

- the meat is steaming hot throughout
- there is no pink meat visible when you cut into the thickest part
- meat juices run clear

This applies to products made from minced meat such as:

- burgers
- sausages
- kebabs
- chicken
- pork

Consider cooking all chicken and pork in the oven first, then giving it a final finish on your barbecue. Your friends and family will still experience that special barbecue chargrilled taste, and you know that you have cooked the meat all the way through.

## **Burgers**

Remember that a burger is not like a steak. [Burgers](#) should always be served well done, they should not be served rare or pink. This is because when meat is minced to produce burgers, any harmful bacteria from the surface of the raw meat spread throughout the burger.

Unless the burger is cooked right through, these bacteria can remain alive on the inside. This applies equally to all meat that is minced, including good quality or expensive meat.

## **Cleaning**

Effective [cleaning](#) gets rid of bacteria on hands, equipment and surfaces, helping to stop harmful bacteria from spreading onto food.

Help minimise the risk of germs spreading by:

- washing hands thoroughly with soap and hot water before cooking and eating, especially if you've been handling raw meat or things like firelighters
- keeping utensils and serving dishes clean when preparing food and ensuring you don't mix those used to prepare raw and ready-to-eat dishes
- never washing raw chicken or any other meat - it just splashes germs onto your hands, utensils and worktops

## **Avoiding cross-contamination**

[Cross-contamination](#) is most likely to happen when raw food touches or drips onto ready-to-eat food, utensils or surfaces.

Prevent it by:

- storing raw meat separately from ready-to-eat foods
- using different utensils, plates and chopping boards for raw and cooked food
- washing your hands after touching raw meat and before you handle ready-to-eat food

## **Understanding food poisoning**

Many people mistakenly think that food poisoning is just a passing tummy bug but it can be really serious.

Most people with food poisoning recover at home and don't need any specific treatment. Find out more about the [symptoms of food poisoning](#) and what to do if someone has severe symptoms.