

Food safety tips for childcare centres

Young children are particularly vulnerable to food poisoning. Food staff at childcare centres and preschools must take extra care when preparing and cooking certain foods for young children to prevent the risk of food poisoning.

Be careful with eggs

Foods containing raw or lightly cooked egg need to be handled with special care, especially for children. If eggs aren't handled correctly, *Salmonella* bacteria on the shell can grow and cause young children to be sick.

Most shell eggs in Australia are clean and free from *Salmonella* but sometimes bacteria can be found:

- inside the egg, which is more likely if the shell is cracked. Some cracks are obvious but even hairline cracks where the shell membrane looks intact can be a problem, and
- on the egg, which is more likely if the shell is dirty with yolk, albumen, soil, feathers and faecal or other matter stuck to the outside.

Food that has been linked to food poisoning outbreaks in Australia as a result of uncooked or lightly cooked eggs include:

- pikelets
- custard
- mousse
- cheesecake
- tiramisu
- runny or under-cooked eggs

How food staff can help keep eggs safe

1. Check eggs

When buying eggs, always:

- buy eggs in cartons that show the name of the supplier and the 'best before' date
- check the eggs are clean, free from visible dirt and feathers, and the shells have no visible cracks
- make sure the eggs have not been stored in the sunlight
- make sure you buy good quality, clean eggs

2. Store safely

When you put the eggs away, you should:

- store them in the refrigerator in their carton, and
- check the temperature in the refrigerator is 5°C or below.

3. Keep clean

When you prepare food:

- wash hands before and after handling eggs
- don't use cracked or dirty eggs
- use fresh eggs (a fresh egg will sink in water, but a stale one won't)

4. Cook thoroughly

Cooking eggs thoroughly (so the yolk is not runny) kills any *Salmonella* that may be present.

When making pikelets or other batters with egg:

- wash and dry hands before and after cooking
- make sure pikelets are cooked all the way through the middle (tip: make the pikelet consistency runnier with more milk)
- wait until the pikelet surface has bubbled before turning over
- cook other side until golden brown
- don't let children lick the bowl or utensils
- refrigerate any pikelets that are not used immediately

No honey for children under one

Honey is not safe for children under one. If an infant consumes honey, it can lead to infant botulism.

Botulism is where *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria releases toxins into the body, causing weakness and paralysis.

If an adult eats honey containing botulinum spores, defence systems in the intestine stop the spores growing. However, young children's digestive systems aren't protective enough to stop bacteria from growing and producing toxins.

Honey is safe for children over one.

Tips for fresh fruit and vegetables

Fresh fruit and vegetables are an important and necessary part of a young child's diet. When serving to young children:

- refrigerate fruit and vegetables at less than 5°C to maintain optimum freshness and ensure food safety

- avoid using fruit and vegetables that are bruised, damaged, mouldy or slimy
- wash all fruit and vegetables with cool tap water immediately before serving
- refrigerate fruit and vegetables as soon as possible after peeling or cutting
- throw away leftover cut produce if it's been at room temperature for more than four hours
- wash your hands thoroughly in hot soapy water, and dry them with paper towel, before and after handling fresh fruit and vegetables

Remember the golden rules of food safety

- keep it cold,
- keep it clean,
- keep it hot, and
- check the label

About NSW Food Authority

The NSW Food Authority is the government organisation that helps ensure NSW food is safe and correctly labelled.

It works with consumers, industry and other government organisations to minimise food poisoning by providing information about and regulating the safe production, storage, transport, promotion and preparation of food.

More information

- visit the Food Authority's website at www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/industry/industry-sector-requirements/childcare/
- phone the helpline on 1300 552 406

Note

This information is a general summary and cannot cover all situations. Food businesses are required to comply with all of the provisions of the Food Standards Code and the *Food Act 2003* (NSW).