

Camping

Preparing food for camps can be very challenging because facilities found in the home or commercial food premises are not generally available. You need to properly plan to ensure food safety. The camp should be memorable only for the outdoor experience and not the food poisoning outbreak that could occur.

The five main considerations for keeping food safe in camps are:

- temperature control of food;
- water supply;
- handwashing facilities;
- protecting food from contamination; and
- disposal of rubbish and waste water to prevent the contamination of food.

Temperature control

The use of potentially hazardous foods when camping should be kept to a minimum unless the food can be kept cold (5°C or colder). Potentially hazardous foods support the growth of bacteria that can cause illness if large numbers of bacteria are present. For a list of potentially hazardous foods see Fact Sheet 4 *Temperature control*.

If your camp is catering for a large number of people, it may be practical to hire gas-powered refrigeration equipment or to use similar facilities close to the campsite.

If you only have limited equipment to keep food cold, buy potentially hazardous foods fresh daily and throw away any leftover food.

You could also consider purchasing foods that are shelf-stable. These are foods that do not need temperature-controlled storage until they are opened. Examples include long-life milk (heat-treated in the carton); canned meats, fish and dairy products; and dried and dehydrated foods.

Water supply

A safe water supply is probably the most important requirement when camping because water is necessary for preparing and cooking food, cleaning utensils and helping to maintain personal hygiene. Your camp will need access to water of drinking quality.

If water at the site is not suitable for drinking, it will need to be treated. The easiest way to treat this water is to boil it, but it has to be protected from contamination during cooling and storage. It is not always practical to boil the amount of water needed for food preparation and personal hygiene and you may wish to use chemical sterilisation. Always follow the manufacturers' instructions when using these chemicals.

Water filters may also be an option but they can be slow and must be maintained in good working condition. You will also need to check with the supplier of the filter to find out whether it will be effective for your purposes. Filters should not be damaged and they may need to be cleaned or replaced regularly.

Sources of drinking water, such as streams, wells and bores, should be protected. Access to the water collection point should be restricted and the area protected from animals and foreign matter.

Use only clean containers that are specifically kept for drinking water. Store them carefully at all times, whether they are full or empty, with their lids fastened.

Handwashing

For effective handwashing, clean warm running water is needed so that soap can function correctly and hands can be rinsed before they are dried. During camping, clean running water is not always readily available. A suitable alternative must be provided to ensure that hands do not contaminate food. You will need to obtain approval to use alternative handwashing methods from your local council or health authority. Alternative methods include the use of sterile wipes or cleaning gels.

If you have access to water of drinking quality, you should set up a temporary handwashing facility that provides running water. You can do this by using a large water container with a tap at its base. Another container, such as a bucket, should collect the waste water, to keep the site dry and clean.

A supply of soap and paper towels must be provided at the handwashing facilities so that handwashing can be undertaken properly. Supply a bin for used towels. This helps to keep the site tidy and prevents contamination from used towels.

Protecting food from contamination

It is very important to protect food from contamination. Bacteria cannot move from place to place by themselves they need help from poor food-handling practices. Poor food handling allows bacteria to be transferred from a non-food source to food, and from one food to another. The risk of contamination is often greater when camping because only basic equipment and amenities may be available.

To protect food from contamination:

- wash your hands before preparing or handling food;
- keep food covered;
- use separate utensils such as knives and chopping boards for different foods;
- keep raw meat and raw fruits and vegetables well away from foods which are ready to eat, such as cooked meat and salads;
- always thoroughly wash and dry your hands after handling raw meat; and
- thoroughly wash and dry eating and drinking utensils and store in a clean place.

Disposal of rubbish and waste water

The disposal of rubbish and waste water needs careful planning because they attract pests and contaminate food if they are not properly stored and disposed of. Rubbish should be bagged and tied, and kept well away from food preparation areas.

There may be a designated disposal area for waste water at your camping site. Always use this - do not dispose of waste water in or near water sources.

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