

Food safety for takeaway chicken shops

Good planning and attention to detail keeps takeaway chicken safe for customers.

Key issues

- Cook chicken properly to kill bacteria and viruses that may cause foodborne illness
- Prevent recontamination of cooked foods and contamination of other ready-to-eat foods
- Keep food at the correct temperature—either hot or cold—so bacteria will not grow

How to meet the food safety requirements

Tactics	Requirements/Suggestions
Have a good work system for handling ready-to-eat foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep raw food, scraps and used utensils separate from cooked food and meals
Be extra careful when handling raw chicken to avoid contamination of ready-to-eat foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use different colour-coded knives and cutting boards for raw and ready-to-eat foods • Clean and sanitise the bench top and utensils after chicken preparation • Wash hands thoroughly after handling raw chicken • Store food covered—raw on the lower shelves and ready-to-eat food on the upper shelves of the refrigerator or coolroom
Use a thermometer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cook chicken until the deep meat temperature reaches 74°C • Display hot food at 60°C • Cool food in small portions so it cools quickly—within two hours from 60°C to 21°C, and then within a further four hours from 21°C to 5°C • Store cold food at 5°C or less
Be diligent about staff personal hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid hand contact with food and don't cough or sneeze near food • Don't allow staff with gastroenteritis to handle food • Supply warm water, soap and paper towels at the hand basin
Make sure food surfaces, equipment and utensils are cleaned and sanitised properly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A visual check is essential but a simple and cheap test for residual protein is better
Train and retrain staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure staff have up-to-date food safety skills

Contamination

The sources of bacteria that cause food poisoning in takeaway chicken shops are:

- Raw food:
 - Raw chicken—a well-known source of food poisoning bacteria
 - Eggs—incorrectly stored raw egg products, such as mayonnaise or egg butter, have caused large outbreaks of foodborne illness
- Food preparation areas (eg the kitchen):
 - Slicers and blenders that haven't been cleaned and sanitised properly after use
 - Bench tops, cutting boards, knives and cloths that have been exposed to raw chicken
 - Food handlers can spread bacterial and viral foodborne illness, especially if they have gastroenteritis.

Temperature abuse

Most bacteria that cause foodborne illness grow very quickly in warm food.

The 'temperature danger zone' is between 5°C and 60°C. Foodborne illness can be prevented if hot food is held at 60°C or more and cold food is held at 5°C or less.

Cooking to the correct temperature kills most food poisoning bacteria and viruses. Some bacteria form a spore (like a tough seed) that is not killed by normal cooking processes. Spores will activate in warm food and can grow to very large numbers if they have time. Correct storage and prompt cooling and reheating of food control this risk.

Contamination plus temperature abuse

Foodborne illness is often associated with a 'string of errors' in the cooking and storage process.

Contaminated food can cause foodborne illness, but contaminated food held at incorrect temperatures can cause very large outbreaks of foodborne illness.

Survey of takeaway chicken shops

A survey of NSW takeaway chicken shops, undertaken in 2010 by nineteen local councils and the NSW Food Authority (see www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/science/market-analysis/takeaway-chicken), found that:

- most businesses displayed hot gravy and mayonnaise-based salads in the temperature danger zone.
- 40% of businesses held shredded or diced chicken for use the next day at incorrect temperatures for an extended period of time.
- 40% of businesses cooled gravy in large containers.
- 45% of businesses used inappropriate sanitation for food preparation surfaces.

Reference

David Mossel, Jaap Jensen and Corry Struijk. *Microbiological safety assurance applied to smaller catering operations world-wide; from angst through ardour to assistance and achievement – the facts.* Food Control 10 (1999) 195–211.

About the NSW Food Authority

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

It works with consumers, industry and other government organisations to limit foodborne illness by regulating the safety of the production, storage, preparation and promotion of food.

More information

- Visit the NSW Food Authority's website at www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au/industry/
- See industry guides and factsheets: *Potentially hazardous foods; Protecting food from contamination; Cleaning and sanitising in food businesses; Health and hygiene requirements of food handlers; Applying the 4-hour/2-hour rule*
- 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).