

Ask a Child Care Adviser: Food safety

Child Care Advisers Karen Swift and Tanya Tregillgas spoke with Lauren Boyle about developing and implementing safe food practices in child care services.

What is food safety and why is it important?

Food safety refers to the correct storage, transportation, heating, preparation and serving of food. It also covers the way in which food preparation areas and utensils are kept clean and hygienic.

Implementing correct food safety and handling procedures reduces the risk of food-borne illnesses. This is of the utmost importance when caring for young children who are more readily susceptible to illnesses.

Which authorities should services use to seek information about food safety and handling?

It is important that services consider information from a recognised authority when developing their procedures and practices relating to food safety.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is the agency responsible for the development and maintenance of a joint Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code. Although FSANZ develops food standards, the responsibility for enforcing and policing food standards rests with state and territory governments. Additionally, many local governments also have jurisdiction over food safety practices in child care services in their local government area. These authorities will provide recommended information about how to store, handle, prepare and serve food and drinks safely and hygienically.



This article relates to:

FDCQA Principles: 4.2 and 4.3

OSHCQA Principles: 6.2 and 6.3

QIAS Principles: 6.2 and 6.3

Staying Healthy in Child Care also provides information on reducing the risks of food-borne illnesses through food safety which is specific to child care settings. This publication can be downloaded free of charge from the National Health and Medical Research Council website.

What is 'cleaning' and what is 'sanitising'?

According to FSANZ:

- Cleaning removes visible food waste, dirt and grease from a surface and is usually achieved by the use of water and detergent
- Sanitising is a process that destroys microorganisms and therefore reduces the numbers of microorganisms present on a surface. This is usually achieved by the use of both heat and water, or by chemicals
- Dishwashers are an effective way of using hot water to sanitise. To manually sanitise using hot water, eating and drinking utensils and food contact surfaces need to be in contact with hot water at temperatures of 77°C for at least 30 seconds
- As for chemical sanitisers, the most commonly used in industries that prepare and serve food are chlorine-based compounds. Please refer to your state food safety authority for more information
- Cleaning and sanitising should be done as separate processes. A surface needs to be thoroughly cleaned before it is sanitised as the effectiveness of sanitising a food preparation surface is reduced if there are food residues and detergents present.

What needs to be sanitised?

- Eating and drinking utensils such as cups, plates and cutlery. Using heat and water may be an appropriate sanitising method
- Food contact surfaces such as chopping boards and benches. While heat and water may be the most appropriate way to sanitise

chopping boards, chemical or commercial sanitisers may be more suitable to sanitise bench tops.

What if the service does not provide food, or only provides some food?

Services still need to ensure safe food handling practices and offer guidance to families who bring meals from home. For example, if a child brings a lunchbox with yoghurt and a sandwich with butter, it is the responsibility of staff to handle and store these items safely and hygienically.

If families pack items that need to be heated, the service should provide information to families about how to pack these lunches safely. It may be useful, particularly in vacation care settings where excursions may mean there is no access to a fridge, to advise families to pack an ice brick or frozen drink with children's lunches. Also provide families with information about foods that are at high risk of becoming contaminated if not stored correctly, such as meats and dairy foods.

Conclusion

Meal and snack times are an important part of every child care routine. Although it is important that these meet children's nutrition needs, it is also essential that services develop and implement sound food safety procedures based on information from the relevant health authority in their state/territory and/or local government area. Effective food handling in child care significantly reduces the risk of food -borne related illnesses affecting children ■

Areas that should be covered in a service's food handling policy:

- Frequency of, and responsibility for, cleaning and sanitising
- Personal hygiene, with particular emphasis on correct handwashing procedures for both adults and children
- Keeping food preparation areas and equipment clean and safe
- Safe food storage, including leftovers. Particular attention should be paid to storage temperatures for raw and cooked food, and the use of thermometers in refrigerators.
- Keeping raw meat and poultry separate from other food
- Safe food preparation and serving, including reheating and keeping food hot (cooked foods must not be heated more than once)
- Handling food brought from home
- Preventing food poisoning
- Heating and storing breast milk (if the service provides care for children who are bottle fed breast milk)
- Communicating with families about food safety
- Food safety during experiences such as children's meal times and cooking activities.

References and further reading

- NCAC. (2007). Sample Food Safety policy template. Retrieved 6 January, 2010, from http://www.ncac.gov.au/policy_development/food_safety_policy_template_html_version.htm
- NHMRC. (2005). Staying Healthy in Child care: Preventing Infectious Diseases in Child Care (4th ed.). Retrieved 15 January, 2010, from <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/ch43syn.htm>
- Tansey, S. (2006). Quality Improvement and Accreditation System Factsheet #3: Food Safety. Surry Hills, NSW: NCAC.
- Tansey, S. (2005). Outside School Hours Care Quality Assurance Factsheet #4: Food Safety. Surry Hills, NSW: NCAC.

Useful websites

- Australian Capital Territory Department of Health: www.health.act.gov.au/c/health?a=&did=10192956
- Better Health Channel: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- Department of Health and Human Services Tasmania: www.dhhs.tas.gov.au
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ): www.foodstandards.gov.au
- Government of South Australia Department of Health: www.dh.sa.gov.au
- Government of Western Australia Department of Health: www.health.wa.gov.au
- Northern Territory Government Department of Health and Families: www.health.nt.gov.au
- NSW Food Authority: www.foodauthority.nsw.gov.au
- Queensland Health: www.health.qld.gov.au
- State Government of Victoria, Australia Department of Health Information: www.health.vic.gov.au/foodsafety