

Media statement

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Avoid food poisoning this Australia Day

Put another snag on the barbie, not a dose of food poisoning this Australia Day.

Sunshine Coast Public Health Physician Dr Andrew Langley said warm weather, preparing food for large numbers of people and overloaded fridges can make Australia Day celebrations a risky period for food poisoning.

He warned that food poisoning could be particularly serious for young children, the elderly, pregnant women and anyone in poor health.

“Crucial aspects for preparing Australia Day meals are planning ahead, the right temperatures for cooking and storing food, and good hygiene,” he said.

“Plan ahead to make sure meat, poultry and seafood are completely defrosted before cooking. Defrosting should occur in the fridge, and this can take several days.”

Dr Langley is urging people to think ahead about whether they will have enough fridge space, and if not, either reduce how much food needs to be kept cold, or find additional fridge space. Soft drinks and alcohol (both of which should only be consumed in small amounts, if at all) often don't need to be refrigerated.

“Simple rules are to keep cold food below 5 °C, cook meat thoroughly, and keep hot food above 60 °C. When cooking meat, use a meat thermometer to make sure the thickest parts of the meat reach at least 75°C. There should be no pink left in cooked poultry and minced products. Juices from the cooked meat should run clear.

“Use separate cutting boards and utensils for raw meat and ready-to-eat foods. Store raw meat, poultry and seafood in leak-proof containers on the bottom shelf of the fridge.

“Prepare foods as close as possible to eating time. Avoid leaving the same nibbles out for long. Put out small serves and replace with fresh food and a fresh dish every couple of hours. Refrigerate leftovers immediately after a meal and use within a day.

“It's also important to wash and dry your hands thoroughly, before preparing foods and after handling raw meat. Use running water and soap, and then dry using clean towel, and don't prepare food if you have had vomiting or diarrhoea in the previous 48 hours,” Dr Langley said.

Dr Langley said the symptoms of food-borne illness may include: diarrhoea; nausea; vomiting; abdominal cramps; fever; and headaches.

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“Symptoms are often the same as for gastro from viruses which are often spread between people, which can make it difficult to tell if the illness is caused by food.

“The time between eating the food and the appearance of the first symptoms may be as long as 5 or more days. The last meal consumed is not usually the culprit.

“It is important to note, foods that cause food-borne illness will not necessarily look, taste or smell any different to safe food,” Dr Langley said.

Dr Langley advised that most people recover in a few days but does warn to seek medical advice if:

- symptoms are very severe or persist
- there is blood in the diarrhoea
- the ill person is an infant, an older person or has other conditions, as the loss of fluids can have more severe impacts in these groups.

“People with diarrhoea and vomiting should also stay home from work, school and other activities, not prepare food, and drink plenty of fluids.

For more information on food safety, visit the website at <http://bit.ly/15reX4S>

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