

Guidelines for Eating Safely during Festive Season

A public health document prepared by:
National Environment Agency

INTRODUCTION

Festive seasons in Singapore are celebrated with consuming an array of dishes with families and friends. It is important to pay close attention to food safety when ordering catered meals, eating out or purchasing ready-to-eat meals for your celebration. Do observe good personal hygiene practices such as using common serving utensils, covering your mouth and nose with disposable tissues when coughing or sneezing, and not tasting the food with your fingers.

You are advised to only purchase food from licensed food establishments. For a more informed choice on the selection of food establishment to patronise or engage, you can look for the track records (hygiene grading, number of demerit points and suspension history) of food establishments on the NEA website (<https://eservices.nea.gov.sg/TR/>).

To minimise the risk of food poisoning to you and your guests during the festive season, do observe the following guidelines when ordering catered meals, eating out or purchasing cooked/ready-to-eat meals.

FOOD SAFETY TIPS

1) Ordering Catered Meals

a) Choosing Caterers

Engage only licensed food caterers. The list of NEA-licensed caterers can be found on NEA's website (<http://www.nea.gov.sg/public-health/food-hygiene/nea-food-establishment-licensees>)

b) Ordering Food

- i. Order enough food for your guests. Do not order in excess so as to reduce wastage. Leftovers should be discarded and not kept for later consumption, to minimise the risks of food poisoning due to prolonged storage of the food.
- ii. Avoid ordering raw or uncooked food, particularly if you have young children, pregnant women or the elderly as guests. If you order uncooked food (e.g. sashimi), check that they are delivered chilled at below 5°C. Once delivered to the function/event site, keep them chilled in refrigerator until ready to serve.

c) Delivery

- i. Request for the food to be delivered 1 hour before designated meal time. This is to prevent food being kept at room temperature for an extended period of time.
- ii. Check that food is delivered in insulated boxes or bags. If the caterer does not have the equipment to keep the food hot or cold, please consume food not later than the “CONSUME BY” time given by the caterer.
- iii. Check that the caterer provides a time stamp label on the packed meal or a time stamp sign for each buffet table. This is a mandatory requirement from NEA with effect from **15 February 2012**.

(The time stamp informs you and your guests of the date and time that the food is cooked or prepared by the caterer and when it should be consumed by. The “CONSUME BY” time should not be later than 4 hours from the time the food is cooked or ready-to-eat and kept between 5°C and 60°C.)

d) Display And Serving

- i. Once delivered, the food should be displayed in an orderly manner. Raw food should be separated from cooked/ready-to-eat food and served with separate utensils.
- ii. Check that the chafing dishes and containers for food are clean.

- iii. Check that clean serving spoons, tongs, ladles and cutleries are provided.
- iv. Check that the chafing dishes have attached covers. Keep the hot food covered until the designated time for consumption.
- v. Check that cold food is kept chilled on ice.
- vi. Check that the caterer displays the time stamp sign prominently. Do not remove or alter the time stamp sign.
- vii. If your event or function lasts beyond 2 hours, display only small portions of food at a time and replenished once finished. Alternatively, you can request for the caterer to deliver a second batch of food at a later timing.

e) Eating

- i. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before eating.
- ii. Consume food within the “CONSUME BY” time given by the caterers.

f) Clearing Up

Arrange for the caterer to come and clear the left-over food and paraphernalia as soon as the meal time is over.

2) Eating Out

a) Choosing Where To Eat

Patronise licenced food retail outlets. When choosing a place to eat, do look out for the following:

- i. Food shop premises are generally clean and tidy.
- ii. Food handlers are wearing clean clothes.

- iii. Food handlers use tongs or clean gloves when handling ready-to-eat food.
- iv. Food handlers use separate utensils and equipment for handling raw and cooked/ready-to-eat food.
- v. Raw and cooked/ready-to-eat food are stored or displayed separately.

b) During Dining

- i. Pay attention to the appearance, texture and smell of the food. Do NOT consume food that you suspect have turned bad or stale.
- ii. Ensure that your food is cooked thoroughly, especially for meat, poultry, fish and eggs. Avoid consuming undercooked food. Return them for further cooking.
- iii. Meat/Poultry - change in the colour of meat (is no longer pink) and juice from the meat runs clear.
- iv. Fish and other seafood - change in texture and colour.
- v. Eggs - both yolk and white are firm.
- vi. Ask for more information on the dish if you are unsure of the ingredients or the preparation method.

c) Patronising Buffet And Self-Service Station

For buffets or self-service restaurants, ensure that:

- i. Food to be eaten hot is stored in hot holding equipment or over burners at above 60°C.
- ii. Cold food is displayed on ice or in refrigerated cabinets at below 5°C.
- iii. Raw and cooked/ready-to-eat food is displayed separately.

- iv. Each food dish has its own serving utensils. Use the one that is allocated to the dish and do not mix the serving utensils. Hold the utensils by the handle and, when replacing, ensure that the handle does not come into contact with the food. Do NOT touch the food on display.
- v. Chafing dishes and containers for food are clean.
- vi. Clean serving utensils (e.g. spoons, tongs and ladles), plates and cutleries are provided.
- vii. Condiments are served in single-serving packets or in clean containers with serving spoons. Packet condiments should be used up or discarded once opened.
- viii. Consumers should refrain from packing left-over food for later consumption.

3) Purchasing Cooked/Ready-to-eat Meals

When placing order for cooked/ready-to-eat meals, do look out for the following:

- a) Purchase cooked/ready-to-eat food as the last task for your journey.
- b) If the food is not going to be consumed right away, store it in the refrigerator as soon as possible.
- c) Re-heat cooked food adequately before eating.
- d) Do NOT keep cooked/ready-to-eat food at room temperature for more than 4 hours.
- e) Discard any cooked/ready-to-eat food that has been left in the temperature danger zone (between 5°C and 60°C) for more than 4 hours.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on hygiene guidelines, please visit the National Environment Agency's website at www.nea.gov.sg.