

Barbecue and picnic food safety advice

If you're planning on having a barbecue or picnic, there are some tips to help prevent food poisoning. Remember that keeping food cool is important. Generally, the cooler the temperature the slower germs will grow.

Barbecues

The main food poisoning risks when using a barbecue are:

- undercooked meat
- spreading germs from raw meat onto food that's ready to eat

The safest option is to pre-cook your food indoors then put the cooked food on the outdoor barbecue for a short time for flavour.

When cooking burgers, sausages, kebabs, pork, turkey and chicken, always check that:

- the meat is steaming hot throughout
- there is no pink meat visible when you cut into the thickest part
- meat juices run clear

Once served, food should not sit out for longer than two hours, or one hour if it's very hot outside.

You can get more information and advice on the [food safety barbecuing page](#).

It's also important to be alert to the risks of [carbon monoxide when barbecuing](#).

Picnic food

Cases of [food poisoning](#) from campylobacter, E. coli, listeria and salmonella increase in the summer months.

Picnickers could be putting themselves at risk by:

- leaving their food out for longer than the recommended two hours
- carrying food to picnics in containers such as plastic bags and picnic baskets, rather than the recommended cool boxes
- putting picnic leftovers back in the fridge or using them for a meal the next day, regardless of how long they have been left out

To help everyone enjoy their summer picnics without worry, these easy tips can help keep you safe:

- rinse fresh fruits (including those with rinds) and vegetables under running tap water before packing them in the cool box
- place cold food in a cool box with ice or frozen gel packs – cold food

should be stored at 5 °C or below to prevent bacterial growth

- pack drinks in one cool box and perishable foods in another – if using freezer packs (frozen drinks work well for this purpose), distribute them throughout the box, not all at the bottom
- keep your cool box closed – once at the picnic site, limit the number of times the cool box is opened as much as you can (this helps to keep the contents cold for longer)

Once you've served the picnic, dishes should not sit out for longer than two hours, or one hour if it's very hot outside.

After this, the risk of bacteria increases and it becomes unsafe to eat, so best to throw it away when you get home.

Find out more on the [cooking for parties and events page](#).

More useful links

[Warning about fake dress websites](#)

Beware websites posing as UK-based businesses, selling poor quality dresses at knockdown prices. You should be cautious when buying online and do your research before making any payment. A bargain that seems too good to be true probably is.

Shopping online

With wedding season now well upon us, [shopping](#) for the perfect dress, mother of the bride, or guest outfit may lead many to search online for that 'something special'.

[Trading Standards Service NI](#) has received a number of complaints from people who have been left out of pocket by what appear to be UK-based, professional occasion wear stockists.

They have bought items from a website ending in '.co.uk' and having what appeared to be a registered UK business address.

Expecting the glamour and quality depicted by the trader, they were all left dismayed on receiving an ill-fitting reproduction with only a passing resemblance to the clothing advertised.

On attempting to return the item, the traders often refuse to acknowledge the poor quality or provide any redress.

In addition to this, some people have then faced an unexpected customs bill

to import the item from China.

A '.co.uk' website address and a UK geographic address guarantees nothing. A trader can be based anywhere in the world and, as such, will have no intention of giving people their right to a 14 day 'cool-off' period when buying online from UK or EU-based websites.

What to do

What appear to be genuine, professional websites frequently use images taken from other internet suppliers.

If dealing with an unfamiliar website, do a simple Google search of the trader's name and website address along with the word 'review' or 'scam'. This can return any poor or negative reviews left by others who have experienced unsatisfactory service or, worse, been scammed out of their money.

When buying anything online, use a secure method of payment. Using a credit or debit card may provide you with more protection.

Don't pay by money transfer.

If you think you need more advice on this, or on any other consumer-related matter, contact [Consumerline online](#) or on 0300 123 6262.

More useful links

[Taking steps to manage stress better](#)

Experiencing stress is a normal part of everyday life and too much stress doesn't just make you feel bad, it can also be bad for your health. But there are steps to take to help manage it better.

Pressure and stress

Stress is the feeling of being under too much mental or emotional pressure. Too much stress can lead to a feeling of being unable to cope.

For example, dealing with changing demands and pressures from different areas in our lives, such as children's needs, money worries, relationships or concerns about work.

If you think you're suffering from [work-related stress](#) you should speak to

your employer.

Common signs of stress include:

- sleeping problems
- sweating
- loss of appetite
- difficulty concentrating

You may feel anxious, irritable, low in self-esteem, have racing thoughts, worry constantly or go over things in your head.

People have different ways of reacting to stress, so a situation that feels stressful to one person may be motivating to someone else.

Stress is not an illness itself, but it can cause serious illness if it is not addressed.

Sometimes when stress is severe it can lead to burnout, with extreme emotional and physical exhaustion.

Dealing with stress

There are some practical steps you can take to deal with stress:

- learn how to relax: listen to music or go for a walk – taking steps to unwind can help stop stress building up
- eat well: during periods of stress it is more important than ever to eat well, as healthy eating can have a positive effect on your emotional wellbeing
- take regular exercise: being active can really help, so take a stroll, get out with the kids or with friends, or take the dog for a walk
- talk to someone: talking about your feelings can really help identify what is causing the additional stress
- work through your problems: taking steps to deal with your problems will make you better able to cope with them

The key is to take positive action before stress really begins to affect your health and wellbeing.

More useful links

[Changes to MOT and other vehicle tests](#)

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From 20 May, there will be some changes to vehicle testing. These deal with the engine management system warning light on all vehicles, and vehicles built on a goods vehicle chassis.

Engine management system warning light

Vehicles will fail the test if their engine management system warning light isn't working, or if the light shows a fault.

Vehicles built on a goods vehicle chassis

Vehicles built on a goods vehicle chassis that previously didn't have to get tested will now have to pass a goods vehicle test annually.

These vehicles include:

- mobile cranes
- electric goods vehicles
- vehicles with special equipment fitted (including those equipped for medical, dental, veterinary, health, educational, clerical and display purposes)
- tower wagons
- breakdown vehicles
- road construction vehicles (not road rollers)
- some trailers designed for producing asphalt
- some mobile engineering plant
- tractor units pulling exempt trailers

You can find information at these links:

More useful links

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Clean your hands on family days out

It's important to clean your hands thoroughly and regularly on days out with the family to the likes of farms or swimming pools. Good hand hygiene can help prevent the spread of infections. By following a few simple tips, you can have an enjoyable time and stay well.

Open farms and swimming pools

Open farms and swimming pools can be great days out for all the family. But it's important to practise good personal hygiene at the appropriate times when visiting these places.

All animals naturally carry a range of organisms, some of which can be spread to children and adults and can potentially cause severe infection, particularly in young children.

For example, *E. coli* 0157 is easily passed from animals to children, can spread easily within the household and may cause severe infection in young children.

Cryptosporidium is another organism which causes infection. Symptoms include vomiting, abdominal cramps and watery diarrhoea. It can happen through contaminated recreational waters, including swimming pools.

Simple steps to follow

To reduce the risk of illness, all adults and children should follow some simple steps to ensure a fun day out.

Advice for swimmers:

- don't swim when you have diarrhoea or have had diarrhoea within the past 48 hours
- don't swim for 14 days after being diagnosed with Cryptosporidiosis
- take a shower before swimming
- wash your hands after using the toilet or changing nappies
- make sure that babies and children wear purpose-made swimming nappies and take your child on bathroom breaks
- do not swallow water

Advice for visits to the farm:

- wash hands thoroughly using soap and water after handling animals or touching surfaces at the farm
- hands should always be washed before eating or drinking and after using the toilet

You can find out more on the following page:

Antibacterial hand gels and wipes are not a substitute for washing hands, as gels and wipes may not remove germs and bugs in the way that running water can.

However, using such gels after hand washing with soap and water may reduce the risk of picking up these infections.

Always supervise children's personal hygiene to make sure it is carried out properly.

More useful links