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In the Pilbara we enjoy our outdoor lifestyle. Whether it's a barbecue, picnic or camping trip the food seems to taste better when you eat it outdoors. But there can be some risks and they're not just mosquitoes or ants. Food poisoning can also be a real risk when eating outdoors, especially in the warmer months. You need to take a little more care when preparing and storing foods for outdoor eating.

Why is eating outdoors any different?

Whether you go on a picnic, barbecue or camping trip there are some things that can increase the risk of food poisoning.

- **Your food will be taken out of its regular environment (the fridge, freezer or pantry) for longer periods of time than usual.**
- You will rely on a cooler (such as an Esky) to keep your food cold. It's hard to get a cooler as reliably and evenly cold as a fridge. The risk that food will remain in the temperature danger zone for long times and that bacteria will begin to multiply can rise.
- Many foods for outdoor eating such as salads, rice dishes, quiche and cold cooked chicken are pre-prepared. These foods need to be protected from cross contamination and stored as close to 5°C as possible because they will be consumed without reheating.
- Often hand washing facilities are inadequate with no hot water or soap available.
- Safe drinking water may not be available.
- Usually picnic tables and barbecue preparation areas are small and not clean. These factors increase the risk of contamination and cross contamination during food preparation. To avoid direct food contact with the surface and use a clean plate or tray.
- People are in a hurry to eat so there may be a temptation to not cook sausages, hamburgers or chicken thoroughly.

Those are the problems - the solution is to take extra care of your food in the outdoors. Here's how:

Barbeques at home

- Keep meat in the fridge until you are ready to put it on the barbecue.
- Keep all ready to eat food covered until you are ready to eat it. This will protect it from contamination by flies, etc.
- Always cook chicken, stuffed meats, sausages and minced meat such as hamburger so that the juices run clear - there should be no hint of pink in the centre. Steaks, chops and whole pieces of meat can be cooked to preference.
- Use a clean plate and clean utensils for cooked meat. Never reuse the same ones you used for the raw meat without washing them.
- Keep salads, patés, spreads, dips and other perishable products in the fridge until needed. It may seem like a great idea to leave food out so that guests can nibble throughout the whole day but, unfortunately, bacteria will also have a feast. It's better to divide these higher risk perishable foods into small amounts and replenish with fresh portions as required. Don't mix fresh top-ups with ones that have been outside for some time. Low risk foods, eg nuts, crisps, crackers, etc. can be topped up.
- Put leftover cooked meats and other perishables into the fridge immediately that part of the meal is finished.

Picnics and barbeques away from home

Remember the simple rule for food safety: keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. This is even more difficult when preparing food for a picnic or outing.

- Put meat into a cooler when travelling. Meat juices can easily leak onto pre-prepared foods so package with this in mind. Just in case, place the meat on the bottom of the cooler away from ready-to-eat food.
- Cut meat into serving-size pieces before leaving home and have all salads ready to eat. This will reduce the need to handle foods particularly when there are no hand-washing facilities.
- Don't pack food for a picnic if it has just been cooked and is still warm. Coolers cannot chill food enough to prevent bacteria growing. Always cover pre-prepared foods securely and keep in the refrigerator overnight. Other perishable foods and drinks, such as deli products, cooked chicken and dairy products must also be cold when put in the cooler.
- Always pack plenty of ice blocks, freezer bricks or gel packs around the food. Frozen drinks thaw quickly in warm weather and serve well as extra cool bricks. If staying at a caravan park ask if you can refreeze some of your bricks overnight or replenish the ice.
- Wicker baskets, unless they are insulated, are best used for non-perishables and your other picnic needs.
- Avoid keeping perishables such as salads, quiches and cold meats out of the fridge for longer than four hours. If you expect to return leftovers to the fridge they should be left out for as short as time as possible.
- It's okay to leave cooked meat to remain warm on a corner of the barbecue or covered on a plate for late arrivals. Just ensure it is protected from flies and, as with cold perishables, avoid leaving it around for more than four hours, (or two hours if leftovers are to be put into the fridge).
- Carry disposable wipes in case there is no water for hand washing.

Tips for camping

- Perishable foods are unsuitable for camping unless you have access to a refrigerator. It is best to use dry, UHT and canned products. Pack all these products in leak-proof containers.
- When you have chosen your site get your cooler out of the car into the shade as soon as possible. You will need to keep moving it as the sun moves.
- Never save leftovers. Cook only enough for your meal and discard the rest.
- Raw and cooked meats and precooked casseroles can be frozen and kept in a cooler for 24 hours provided they are cooked or reheated properly.
- Keep eating and drinking utensils clean. Use clean warm water and detergent, dry thoroughly using a clean tea towel and store in a covered box. If warm water is not available, use clean boiled or disinfected water.
- Keep utensils used for preparing raw foods away from ready-to-eat foods. Wash in between use (remember to wash your hands too).
- Unless you are sure the water at the campsite has been treated always boil your drinking water or use disinfecting tablets. No matter how pristine and isolated your camping site looks there is a risk of bacteria and parasites in the water.
- Washing hands after going to the toilet is just as important when you are camping as it is when you are at home. Use disposable wipes if necessary.
- Keep the campsite as clean as possible. Birds and animals can be a source of food poisoning bacteria so don't leave food and utensils lying about.

And for safety's sake remember the 6 key tips:

- Keep hot food steaming hot
- Keep cold food refrigerated
- Cook food properly
- Keep kitchen and utensils clean
- Wash hands with soap and dry thoroughly
- Separate raw and cooked foods

If you need more information about any matter raised in this document, please contact the City of Karratha's Environmental Health Service on 9186 8555.