

Environmental Services Department



Food Safety Guidance for Businesses

Preparation of food in advance

Catering premises cannot always freshly prepare food from raw ingredients for each customer and must, therefore, prepare certain foods in advance of requirements. However, the practice of preparing large quantities of certain foods, such as sauces and rice, well in advance of requirements, cooling them too slowly or storing them at warm temperatures can result in a serious risk of food poisoning.

The purpose of this guidance is to highlight the problems associated with advance preparation of such foods and to give advice on methods of reducing or eliminating the risks of food poisoning.

What problems are there with rice?

A particular hazard associated with rice results from a bacteria called *Bacillus cereus*. This organism can produce two distinct forms of food poisoning, the more common form of which produces nausea and vomiting between one and five hours after consumption.

Bacillus cereus also has a dormant form, known as spores, which will survive normal cooking and will produce harmful toxins (poisons) if the food is not cooled quickly and refrigerated. The toxins are highly resistant to heat and so would not be killed off by further heating.

How can I avoid food poisoning?

Rice should not be prepared for more than one day's use at a time. **Cooked rice** should be **served at once or cooled**, within 1½ hours and refrigerated at 5°C or below. Preparation of fried rice should be from **refrigerated rice**. Cooked rice **should not** be kept at room temperature. Rice salads should **always** be prepared from cooled rice to minimise risks of food poisoning.

Reheating leftover rice is not recommended

What about sauces?

It is common practice for commercial caterers to prepare sauces in advance, to keep them warm during the serving of meals. If the temperature is not properly controlled there is a possibility of food poisoning, especially if sauces are to allow them to cool at room temperature and to re-heat any leftovers later.

How can I avoid problems with sauces?

The risk of food poisoning from sauces can be avoided by:

- only preparing small quantities of sauce
- keeping the sauce hot, i.e above 63°C
- never "topping-up" any sauce pots with new ingredients
- avoiding contamination of the sauce once it has been produced

Remember –

The cost of discarding unused rice or sauce is minimal compared to the damage which could be caused to your business by a food poisoning incident.

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